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by
WILLIAM TENN



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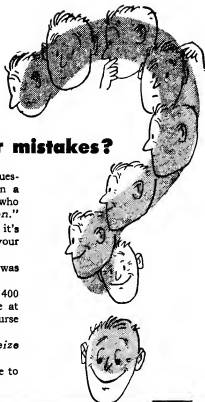
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Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. Editorial—New York Office, 508 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y. Copyright under International Copyright Convention. Entered as second class matter June 3, 1947 at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional second class entry, Holyoke, Massachusetts. Subscription: In U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America, and U. S. Possessions \$3.50 for 12 issues, all other foreign countries, \$4.50 for 12 issues. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.



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Only one man in a world of women. And strangely enough, none of them wanted him. Until Rhea found out why man are desirable...

Front cover painting by Joe Tillotson, from a

scene in "Medusa Was A Lady!"

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE OTHER evening we went to one of these so-called modern conveniences—a drive-in theatre, where you spill coke all over your upholstery while watching a Hollywood epic through a dirty windshield. The picture was called "Northern Pacific"—"Southern Pacific"—"Eastern Pacific"—"Southwest Pacific"—or some Pacific. It doesn't make a great deal of difference what it was called, because we've seen several of them and the plots are always the same.

THE SHOOTING script comes—we believe—out of the lower right hand drawer of the producer's desk where a dozen or so mimeographed copies of the epic is stored, with a blank space on each copy for whatever title they intend to give it.

WHAT'S THIS got to do with science fiction? Stick around a minute, chum. We'll tell you.

BUT FIRST, let's go into this standard plot for all railroad epics. In the beginning, a bunch of fools always want to put a railroad across country an eagle would need a pair of spare wings to navigate. Impossible. But not to our hero. His mother was a common house fly and his father a bumble-bee, so he has no trouble walking up sheer walls to lay out the course.

NOW COMES the villain. He never wants the railroad to go through on account of he's a congenital meanie and

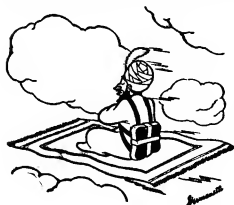
he always finds a bunch of great-hearted but thick-headed native woodsmen (and why must great-hearted native woodsmen always be thick-headed?) whom the villain uses to further his foul ends.

THERE'S HELL to pay from page six on the shooting script straight through to page 39, and sometimes spilling over onto page 40. Then, of course, a helpless minority must be found to blame for the dirty work. So in come the Indians on page 41. After all, who cares about Indians. Kill 'em kick 'em throw 'em around. Give Junior a stick of dynamite as long as he promises to blow up nothing but Indians. So the redskins take the rap, the villain gets kicked over a cliff, and the road goes through.

THERE'S ONLY one possible railroad epic left to be done, because they've about run out of directions. We're waiting with bated breath for this last one. It will be called Evanston Illinois Pacific, and will feature Samuel Insull in a coon-skin cap pushing the Chicago & North Shore Electric up the shore of Lake Michigan. The big scene will be when 40 Indians sit down on the third rail and get their pants roasted.

AND WHAT has this to do with science fiction? As long as you keep asking, we'll tell you. Hollywood has jumped with glee on the science-fiction bandwagon, and even at this writing they've already worked out their precious formula. The shooting script is already slated for the lower left hand drawer, to be turned out in three-dozen lots. It concerns a Horror from space coming to Earth to menace the Terrans. Only the hero knows about it. (The hero being one man or possibly a group.) The horror is finally killed, chased back, domesticated, and the world is saved. This story has already been called "The Thing" and "The Man From Planet X"—just to name two titles. And there will undoubtedly be many more. (Films like Destination Moon" and "When Worlds Collide" are notable exceptions to the general list.)

THAT IS, there will be more of this type of corn if we—the loyal fans—don't keep our quarters tight in our paws and make Hollywood throw the formula out the window..... LES



MARKS THAT MAKE SENSE

AN ALPHABET is a series of characters which represent the sounds of a language. They form words employed in expressing the ideas which the language as a whole conveys. They are, then, the vehicle of communication.

Since primitive man first scratched his pictographs on the walls of his cave, over 250 alphabets have been developed and have been used as a means of expressing and communicating thought. Of the 250, only about 50 have survived and are now in use. About half of this number are found in India, where their use is both restricted and local. The remaining numbers are variations of three scripts representing Roman, Arabic, and Chinese characters which are in use today. The one representing the greatest progress is that of the Roman.

**By
PETER
DAKIN**

modifications, can be traced to the Phoenicians, the trading branch of the Semites, but no farther. The Phoenician alphabet that was carried to the Greeks consisted of twenty-two characters, only three or four of which correspond in form to the letters of the English alphabet in use today.

There have been many attempts made to identify the Phoenician letters with the characters representing Egyptian hieroglyphics. Emanuel de Rouge, a French philologist, sought to prove that the source of the alphabet was to be found in the hieratic characters as shown in the *Papyrus Prisse*, an Egyptian document. Canon Isaac Taylor, in his book *The Alphabet*, adopted de Rouge's opinion as to the origin of these characters. E. Clodd, in *The Story of the Alphabet*, challenged this opinion. Other writers have tried to show a connection between the Phoenician alphabet and the cuneiform systems of Assyria and Babylon. The early Babylonian characters which are supposed to furnish evidence of the origin of the Phoenician alphabet are about 2000 years older than the earliest Phoenician inscriptions, and they had been subjected to many changes during this time. There is evidence that the Phoenicians had trade intercourse with both the Egyptians and Babylonians, because some of the early Phoenician characters making up the Phoenician alphabet resemble in many respects some of the characters used by the early Egyptians and Babylonians.

Present evidence points to the reasonable conclusion that the employment of a small number of signs to represent the elementary sounds originated with the Semites, of which race the Phoenicians were a branch, and that the English language has come to us from this source—with many modifications, changes, and additions through the Greek and Latin alphabets.

Perhaps you think it's easy to trace the origin of, and the changes in, each of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet used by the English-speaking peoples. But such is not the case. They may be traced along a fairly well-beaten road for, maybe, 2500 years or so, but beyond this the road forks so many times and these divide again into dimmer roads and trails, branching in many directions, until they disappear entirely.

Actually, there's no time or place where the characters of our alphabet began; a table of their derivations cannot be produced with any degree of certainty. On these, characters have sprung into being as a result of necessity and each has passed through centuries of almost imperceptible growth.

The characters used in the English alphabet, with their various changes and



Medusa Was A

By William Tenn



The King pointed his finger. Then, "Oh, there's no fun punishing people anymore," he cried

Lady!



*A myth is as good as a mile Percy found out
after he killed Medusa and she didn't die*

"And thence came the son of Danae, flaming with courage and spirit;

Wise Athena brought him thus to the fellowship of these stalwart men.

He slew the Gorgon and winged back, bringing to the islanders

The head with its writhing snake-locks, the Terror that froze to stone."

—Pindar, Pythian

THE BIT of parchment on which the words were written in large, blotty letters had a bad smell. Like everything else in the apartment, Percy S. Yuss thought bitterly. He turned the parchment around in his fingers—annoyed at the strange discomfort he experienced in handling it—and grunted in disbelief.

Its back still had a few fine brown hairs clinging to the badly tanned surface. Someone had evidently gone to the trouble of killing an animal and skinning it, merely to write a translation of a long-dead poet's little-known verse.

Such eccentrics as these three rooms had known!

He dropped the handkerchief-size square of dead tissue on the floor, with the rest of the fantastic garbage, that varied from a ballet dancer's worn white slippers to four wooden chair legs which had evidently been chopped off with an exceedingly sharp axe—to judge from the unbelievable smoothness of the cut-away surface.

What an amazing and varied collection of junk! He shook his head as he shepherded the stuff into a great pile with the broom he'd discovered in the kitchen. A man's safety razor, a woman's curling iron, notebook upon notebook filled with strange and unrecognizable scripts. Not to mention the heap of locked suitcases on the top of which he'd just chucked his own

battered valise.

In these days, one did not look gift apartments in the foyer, so to speak. Still, he couldn't help wondering why these previous tenants hadn't bothered to come back for their possessions. He found himself tingling uncomfortably as when he'd first seen the parchment.

Maybe they hadn't paid their rent. No, that couldn't be. It was such a wonderfully small rent, that even people who didn't own a half interest in a mildly bankrupt hash-house wouldn't have too much trouble raising it. It had been the lowness of the rental figure that had made Percy scramble frantically in his wallet for the thirty-five dollars' worth of cumshaw the superintendent had demanded. After years of tramping from dismal furnished room to dingy sublet to get at long last a place as cheap as this in his own name!

Percy sighed the smug, deeply happy sigh of the happy householder. It smelled, it was badly littered and would require at least two full days to get clean, but it was his, all his. Enthusiastically, he bent his back into the broom again.

THE HALL door opened and Mrs. Danner walked in without knocking. From the living room, where he was scraping the rubbish together, Percy saw the rather badly used-up old lady who served as a combination janitor, building superintendent and renting-agent, stagger into his kitchen. A half-empty fifth of whiskey swung restlessly from one bony hand as a kind of liquid epitaph to thirty-five dollars that had once been in Percy's possession and was no longer.

She leaned against a wall, first patting it gently so that it wouldn't get frightened and leap away. "Good old, lovely old, moneymaking apartment," she muttered. "They come and they go, they come and they go, but you're

always left for me. And every time they come, little Marybelle Danner gets another ten bottles. Darling gorgeous old apartment, you're my *splurfsk!*"

The last word, Percy realized as he walked sternly into the kitchen, was not an entirely novel term of endearment coined on the spot by Mrs. Danner, as much as it was a very ordinary word dissolved beyond recognition into the hearty gulp of whiskey with which she frequently punctuated her sentences.

"Pretty apartment!" she continued, rubbing her back against the filthy wall like a kitten which had grown to lanky old age without ever having become a cat. "The owners don't pay me enough to feed the teensiest canary, my children don't care what becomes of their sweet old ma, but you watch out for me, don't you? You won't let me *sturleglglg*. Every single time a new tenant—"

She lowered the bottle with which she had been preparing a new and moister period. She leaned forward from the hips, blinking madly through worn, red-lined eyes. "You still here?"

"Yes, I'm still here," Percy told her angrily. "After all, I just moved in this morning! What are you doing in my apartment?"

Mrs. Danner straightened. She waved her head from side to side like a bewildered grey banner. "How can he still be here?" she asked the neck of the bottle in a confidential whisper. "It's been over four hours since he took possession. None of the others ever stayed that *lurngsht*." She wiped her lips. "Not one of them!"

"Look here. I paid one month's rent in advance. I also gave you a big hunk of cash under the table, even though it's illegal. I have to work pretty hard for my money in a hot and stinking little luncheonette that seems to go further into the red with every bit of business we do."

"Too bad," Mrs. Danner told him

consolingly. "We should never have elected Hoover. I voted for Al *Smig-lugglug*. He wouldn't have let the Kaiser get away. Here. You need a drinkie before you disappear."

"The reason," Percy went on patiently, "that I paid you all this cabbage was so I could have an apartment of my own. I don't want you walking in without knocking. This is my place. Now was there anything you wanted?"

She batted her eyes mournfully at him, took another shot, belched and started for the door. "All I wanted was the apartment. But if 't isn't ready yet, it just isn't *reyurmph*. I can wait another hour or two if I have to. I'm no *purksk*."

THE NEW tenant closed the door behind her very carefully. He noticed again that there was an area of splintered wood around the place where the lock had been—as if it had been necessary to break the door down upon the last occupant.

What did that point to? Suicide, maybe. Or Mrs. Danner's mention of disappearances—could that be taken seriously? It would explain all that queer junk, all those full suitcases, as if people had just been moving in when—

When what? This was the scientific twentieth century and he was in one of the most civilized cities on the face of the Earth. People didn't just walk into a cold tenement flat on the west side and vanish. No, it wasn't logical.

Anyway, he'd better get a lock on the door before he left for work. He glanced at his watch. He had an hour and a half. Just enough time to take a quick bath, buy the lock and screw it on. He'd finish cleaning the place tomorrow.

The bath was a tiny, four-foot affair that stood high on angle-iron legs beside the kitchen sink. It had a huge enamel cover that was hinged to the wall. There was more junk piled on

the cover than there had been on the floor. With a sigh, Percy began to carry the stuff into the half-clean living room.

By the time he was through, the other room was a mess again and he was hot, tired and disgusted. Trust Percy Sacrist Yuss to get this kind of bargain, he thought angrily as he wedged the cover up against the wall, filled the little bathtub with water, and began to undress. A dark, dirty apartment, filled with the garbage of countless previous tenants, and not only had he had to pay extra money to get the place, but now it seemed there was a curse on it too. And a curious drunken female superintendent who would probably let him have all the privacy of a hot suspect in the Monday morning police line-up!

He took a towel and a fresh bar of soap from his valise. His mood grew blacker as he realized his feet had become coated with a kind of greasy grime as a result of standing on the kitchen floor. The place probably had vermin, too.

Bending down to brush off his feet so that he wouldn't carry the soil requirements of a potato patch into the bathtub, he noticed a scrap of white on the floor. It was the parchment with the fragment of classic poetry laboriously traced out on one side. He'd scuffed it into the kitchen while tramping back and forth.

As he glanced at it cursorily once more, another peculiar electric shiver went through him with the force of a galloping virus infection:

"...He slew the Gorgon and winged back, bringing to the islanders

The head with its writhing snake-locks, the Terror that froze to stone."

WHO WAS it who had slain the Gorgon? Some character in Greek mythology—but who exactly he just couldn't remember. For some rea-

son, the identity and the name escaped him completely. And usually he had a fine memory for such little items. Twenty years spent working out crossword puzzles after a frenzied day dealing them off the arm in dining-cars was almost the equivalent of a college education.

He shrugged and flipped the parchment away. To his annoyance, it bounced off the upright bathtub cover and into the water. Trust his luck! He hung the towel on a crossbar of the tall bathtub legs and climbed in, having to duck his head and twist his shoulders down laboriously to avoid the wooden dish-closets set on the wall some three feet above the tub.

His knees were well out of the water in the little bathtub, practically digging into his chest. Washing himself under these conditions was going to be real cozy!

It was impossible now to recapture the earlier mood of exultation at having an apartment of his own. He felt he'd been taken, as he'd felt all through his life after being persuaded to go into some scheme or other. Like buying a half-interest in a restaurant which the sheriff already regarded with fond proprietary interest.

"I'm not even taken," he said unhappily. "I give myself away!"

And on top of everything, the plug leaked! The level of water sank rapidly down to his hips. Cursing his parents for being attracted to each other in the first place, Percy reached forward to jab it more securely in place. As he did so, the parchment, floating face up on the water, caught his eye.

Long strands of hair now trailed it wetly, and the words were beginning to dissolve in the water. He wasn't interested in it; more, he felt very strongly that he shouldn't be interested in it, that here, in this bit of archaic verse, was more living danger

than he had ever known in his screaming nightmares. He felt that strange tingle begin again in the inner recesses of his body, and knew that his instincts to toss it away had been right, that the curiosity that impelled him to read it every time he picked it up was utterly, terribly—

"And thence came the son of Danae—"

ALMOST against his will, his mind wondered. *Thence?* Where *thence?* Somehow, he felt he knew. But why should he feel that way? He'd never read a line by Pindar before. And why should he be wondering about it in the first place? He had other troubles, lots of them.

His hand swept the parchment up like a particularly disgusting insect. Up and over the side of the bathtub. Right into the bluish waves that billowed all around him.

Into the sea.

He hardly had time to let his jaw drop. Because the bathtub began to sink. Percy was bailing before he realized he was doing it.

This time the water was bubbling into the tub. With a convulsive gesture of his entire body that almost threw him over the side, he clamped his left foot down hard upon the defective plug and splashed the tepid mixture out with two threshing, barely-cupped hands.

In spite of his inaccurate roiling and tossing, he had the tub all but emptied in a matter of seconds. A thin trickle of sea-water still lounged out from between his toes. He reached over the side, noticing uncomfortably that the rim was a bare two inches above the sea's restless surface. Yes, the towel was still in place, knotted intricately around the cross-bar. It was soaking wet, but it made a magnificent reinforcement for the plug. With fingers that had sharpened into

a remarkable deftness under the grinding surprise of the moment, he jabbed corners of the towel all around the edges of the rubber plug.

Not perfect, but it would hold back the waters. Now, where was he?

He was in a bathtub which—temporarily at least—was floating in a warm and only slightly choppy sea, a sea of the deepest, most thrilling azure he had ever seen. Ahead, an island rose in a mass of incredibly stately and delicately colored hills.

Behind him there was another strip of land, but it was lost in a gentle mist and was too far away for him to determine whether it too was an island or the outstretched finger of a continent.

To the right, there was more blue sea. To the left—

Again he almost fell out of the tub. Some fifty feet off to the left was quite the largest sea-serpent he had ever seen in or out of the Sunday Supplements.

And it was humping along the waves directly at him!

Percy leaned forward and paddled madly at the water on both sides of his tub. What a world, he thought, what an insane world for a quiet man to find himself in! What had he ever done to deserve—

HE HEARD a peculiar rattle of sound, like a cement-mixer gargling, and looked up to see the monster staring down at him through unwinking eyes. It was, the back of his mind gibbered, all of two feet in diameter: no doubt it could swallow him without even gulping. A row of bright red feathers plumed up from the top of his head as the great mouth opened slowly to reveal countless rows of jagged, fearful teeth.

If only he had a weapon! A knife of any sort, a stone, a club... Percy clambered upright in the tub, his fists

clenched desperately. As the mouth opened to its fullest width and the forked tongue that looked as sharp and deadly as a two-headed spear coiled back upon itself, he lashed out with his right arm, putting into the blow all the strength of cornered despair.

His fist caught the beast on its green lower lip.

"Ouch!" it said. "Don't do that!"

It swirled away from him so vehemently that his little enameled craft was almost swamped. Licking its lip with its flickering tongue, it paused to stare back at him indignantly over a glistening coil.

"That hurt, you know? All I wanted to do was say, 'Welcome, son of Danae,' and you have to go and bop me one! You won't make many friends acting like that, I can tell you."

The monster swam a bit further away and curved to face the goggling Percy standing limply in his bathtub.

"You didn't even ask if I was working for the snake-mother or Poseidon or whatever! Maybe for all you know I'm an independent operator. Maybe I have a bit of information that would save your life or the life of someone pretty important to you. No, all you can do is hit me," the creature sneered. "And on the lip, which as everyone knows is my most sensitive part! All right, son of Danae, if that's the way you want it, that's the way it's going to be. I won't help you."

With a kind of rippling shrug that threaded disdainfully from the enormous head down to the thin delicacy of a tail, the sea-serpent dived. And was gone.

Percy sat down carefully, feeling the hard sides of the tub as caressingly as if they were his own sanity.

Where in the world was he? Or, rather, where out of it was he? A man starts to take a bath in his new apartment and winds up in—in—Was that

how the others had gone?

He stared over the side through the clear sea. The legs of painted angle-iron which had supported the bath-tub were sheared off cleanly about halfway down. Fortunately, the faucets had been shut off; the pipes were also cut. Like something else. He remembered the chair legs back in the apartment.

Four chair legs minus a chair. Somewhere, then, in this world there might be a chair without legs. Containing someone who had purchased an apartment from Mrs. Danner.

PERCY REALIZED suddenly that there was a very bad taste in his mouth. An awful taste, in fact.

Of course. The soap. When he'd started bailing upon arrival in this weird place, he had a cake of soap in his hand. He'd stuck it in his mouth. And up to now he hadn't had a really peaceful moment in which to remove it.

He extracted the somewhat soggy pink bar from his teeth with a distinct lack of relish and washed his mouth out carefully with sea water. As he did so, he noticed that he had drifted much closer to the island. There was evidence of life somewhere behind the beach, a few slowly moving human beings and a cluster of huts or houses—at this distance it was hard to tell which.

What were his resources in dealing with this new world? He considered them ruefully. A slightly used cake of soap. An extremely wet bath towel. A round rubber plug, too badly worn to do its job properly. And a bathtub, if he could move it once he got to shore.

Then, of course, there was himself. "Like if the natives go in for human steak," he grimaced.

A sea-serpent that talked! Whose

dignity had been injured, who had even gone so far as to— Wait a minute! What had it called him?

Son of Danae.

But he wasn't!

"Go tell the sea-serpent," he told himself fiercely. He remembered the verse on the bit of parchment abruptly: "*The head with its writhing snake-locks—*"

"I've got to get out of here!" he commented restlessly and with tremendous conviction, glancing from the rocking tub to the placid rolling sea from which anything might be expected.

For a moment, when the net flapped down upon his shoulders, Percy had the frantic idea that he'd been overheard by some deity who had hurried to cooperate. He struggled, threshing wildly against the coarse, knotted fibers that tore at his skin. Then, as he felt the entire tub caught in the huge skein and being drawn rapidly toward shore, he relaxed into *now what?* hopelessness and tried to see what had happened.

HE HAD drifted in front of a cliff-like promontory of the island. A group of men dressed in loin-cloths were dancing about on the edge of the cliff, cheering a richly-clad fellow who, from a precarious foothold halfway down the steep face, had flung the net and, with dexterous twists of wrist and forearm, was now hauling it in.

"Attaboy, Dictys!" one of them yelled as the tub beached, turned over and, with Percy crashing around under it, was dragged up the side of the cliff. "You got it all right, all right."

"That Dictys," another commented admiringly. "He's death on sea monsters. This'll be the third he caught this week."

"The fourth," Dictys corrected as he scrambled to the top of the cliff

with the bathtub and the net-enclosed man both securely on his shoulder. "You forgot the pigmy mermaid—half-woman, half-sardine. I count it even though she was kind of small. But this'll be the best of the lot. I've never seen anything like it before."

He unwound the net rapidly with long-practised gestures. Percy climbed out of the tub and flopped on the ground. He felt like a bag of well-gnawed bones.

Dictys picked him up with a huge hand, he'd him out for inspection. "This isn't a monster," he said in evident bitter disappointment. "It comes apart: half of it is a man and the rest is a round sort of chest. And I thought it was something really unusual! Oh well," he mused, lifting Percy over his head with the obvious intention of throwing him back into the sea, "You can't hit it all the time."

"Maybe," suggested an oldster on the edge of the group, "maybe he is a monster. He could have changed into a man just now. He might know that if he's a monster we'd put him in your brother's zoo, but if he's a man we'd throw him back because we've got lots of people here already."

The tall man nodded thoughtfully. "You might have something there, Agesilaus. I'd hate to go back to King Polydectes empty-handed. Well, there's an easy way of finding out."

What kind of world is this? Percy was frantic. "—if he's a man we'd throw him back because we've got lots of people here already!"

And what kind of test were they going to apply?

He noticed that the well-dressed fisherman had unsheathed the great single-bladed sword he wore on his back. He ground the point of it into Percy's chest interrogatively.

"You better change to your particular monstrous form fast, sonny."

Because you're not going to have the pleasure of being returned to the drink. Instead, I'm going to cut you up into six distinct and separate slices in just a few seconds. You'll be *much* better off in my brother's cages. Now then, what exactly are you?"

PERCY BEAT against his forehead with an open palm. What was he supposed to do—develop a quick-change routine on the spot that included wings, flippers and a Siamese twin? Because if he didn't, he was evidently going to become cutlets.

"All right," Dictys said, frowning. "Go ahead—be stubborn. See what it gets you."

He whirled the bronze blade experimentally around his head, then curved it back for a tremendous stroke.

Percy swallowed as he saw it glint redly at him. "I'll talk," he babbled. "I'll tell you about myself! I'm—I'm—"

What could he tell them that would make sense in their terms? What kind of lie could he compose in a hurry that they would believe? They wanted him to make like a monster.

Monster! He'd talked to a—

The words boiled rapidly out of his lips. He had no time to weigh them. "I'm the man the sea-serpent welcomed as the son of Danae." He hoped it would at least give the big fellow pause.

It did.

Dictys lowered his sword and stepped back staring. "The—the son of Danae? The one who's going to kill the Gorgon?"

"The same." Percy nodded with the self-conscious grandeur of a celebrity discovered by the night-club m.c. at a ringside table. "The... the famous Gorgon killer. The—the man who brought the islanders the head with the writhing snake-locks, the Terror

that—"

"Who *will* bring, you mean," Dictys corrected him. "It's not done yet. Well, well, well. You're kind of scrawny for that sort of job, even if you do have red hair. What's your name?"

"Percy. Percy S. Yuss."

"Right!" Agesilaus yelped from the rear. He came hurrying up, his beard flaunting behind him like an oversized white woolen necktie. "It figures, Dictys, it figures! Right on the dot of the prophecy. His name's Perseus, he has red hair, you caught him in a fish-net—everything happened exactly the way the oracle said—"

Dictys thrust out his lower lip and shook his head. "Oracles are one thing. Muscles are another. Nobody's going to tell me that this weakling is going to tackle the beast that frightens the bravest men and even other monsters, no matter how powerful. Look at him—he's quivering with fear already!"

THIS WAS not exactly true. Percy became chilled standing on the windy hillside in nothing but his wet skin. There was, besides, an emotional reaction to all his recent experiences setting in. But there was also a mounting discomfort at the way they were discussing his capabilities as a Gorgon-killer. He'd thrown in the sentence merely as a means of distracting Dictys temporarily; now it seemed they couldn't get off the subject. The beast that frightened men and gods!

He thought back wistfully to a few minutes ago when he'd been riding a serpent-infested sea in a leaky bathtub. Ah, those were carefree, happy times!

"His name's not even Perseus," Dictys was arguing. "It's Persaesus or something. You're not going to tell me that this bedraggled bumpkin will become the most famous hero of all time?"

Agesilaus nodded vehemently. "He

certainly will! As far as the name's concerned, I think it's close enough. Sometimes the oracle gets names mixed up. But here's the chest in which the oracle said Perseus would arrive with his mother, Danae, after King Acrisus of Argos tossed them into the sea."

"Yes, but the oracle said the infant Perseus," another loin-clothed man broke in. "Didn't she?"

"Well," Agesilaus hedged. "Sometimes the oracle gets ages mixed up too." The old man looked a little now as if he were no longer certain about oracular dependability on any matter.

Percy found himself sympathizing with him. Agesilaus was evidently pleading his case, but he wasn't certain which way he'd be worse off, if the old man won or lost.

Dictys came in fast for the argumentative kill. "If King Acrisius of Argos, according to the oracle, threw Perseus and his mother into the chest, then where is Danae? And another thing, Agesilaus. Argos is that way," he pointed with a braceleted hand. "Northwest. This fellow came from the east. No, he's an impostor trying to cash in on the prophecy. And I don't like impostors."

He reached down for a couple of lengths of rope with which several of the men had been repairing holes in the net. Before Percy could get a word of protest out of his slowly opening mouth, he was tripped expertly and tossed to the ground. In a moment, he was tied up as tightly as an expensive Christmas present.

"What's the penalty for impersonating a hero?" Dictys asked Agesilaus. The packaging job completed, he removed his knee from the gasping young man's back and rose.

"For impersonating a hero," the old man said thoughtfully, with an unsatisfied frown still creasing his face, "the penalty's the same as for blasphemy. Cooking over a slow fire. In

fact, since your brother, King Polydectes, reformed the legal system, practically every crime is punishable by cooking over a slow fire. Your brother says it makes it easier for him to pass sentence that way. He doesn't have to remember a whole calendar of complicated punishments."

"That's why we call him Wise King Polydectes," one of the younger men exclaimed, and everyone nodded enthusiastically.

"Listen—" Percy began screaming from the ground. Dictys stuck a handful of grass into his mouth. There was enough loose soil attached to make the gag a verb as well as a noun. He was so busy strangling that he had little energy for observation and less for an attempt to escape when two of the men slung him to a pole and began carrying him downhill over highly uneven ground.

"Hi, there, Menon," he heard someone call as he was borne choking and sneezing along a dusty road. "Whatcha got?"

"Don't know for sure," the forward bearer replied. "I think it's kettle bait."

"You don't say! This crime-wave gets more frightening every week!"

BY THE time Percy had worked the last of the foliage out of his mouth, they had passed through the huge gateway of a stone-walled citadel and into a cluster of small but surprisingly well-built brick houses.

His pole was placed in two forked sticks set upright in the main thoroughfare of the town. He dangled from the tight ropes, feeling his blood grinding to a halt.

A group of curious men and women gathered around asking questions of his two guards.

"Is that the latest monster Dictys has caught?" a woman wanted to know. "He doesn't seem to be very

unusual." She poked experimentally at choice spots on his naked body. "Practically normal, I'd say."

"Stew-job," the bearer said laconically. "Nice tender stew-job,

As far as was possible in his tightly laced condition, Percy writhed. No, this couldn't be happening to him—this just couldn't be! A man doesn't start taking a bath in a new apartment and wind up in a world where everything from burglary to barratry is punished by—

"I will not consider that thought," his mind announced. "I know when I'm well off."

Certain things were clear to him, though, disagreeably clear. He had somehow fallen into a past which had never really existed, the time of the Greek myths. Never really existed? The sea-serpent's indignation had been real enough, and so were the ropes with which he was bound. So, he suspected, would be the punishment, if he were found guilty of impersonating a hero.

Odd, that. The serpent addressing him as the son of Danae, who was evidently the mother of Perseus. His own name, which formed a combination of syllables remarkably like the Gorgon killer's. The bit of parchment he'd found in the apartment which evidently had helped precipitate him into this mess, and the subject of the snatch of poetry written upon it. The way he'd come close to the legend in various other ways, such as the arrival by sea—

No! When his trial came up, he wanted to plead absolute innocence, that he had no knowledge whatever of the Perseus prophecy and no interest at all in it. Otherwise, thinking all those other thoughts could only lead in one direction....

He shivered violently and vibrated the pole briefly.

"Poor fellow, he's cold! a girl's voice said sympathetically.

"That's all right. King Polydectes will warm him up," a man told her. Everyone guffawed. Percy vibrated the pole again.

"I never said I was Perseus!" the bound young man broke out despairingly. "All I did was tell your Dictys that the sea-serpent—"

"You'd better shut up," the bearer who had been called Menon advised him in a confidential, friendly manner. "For trying to influence the jury before a trial, you can have your tongue torn out by the roots—whether you're eventually found guilty or innocent."

PERCY DECIDED to keep quiet. Every time he opened his mouth, he put the local criminal code in it. He was getting deeper and deeper into the most fantastic trouble and didn't have the slightest idea how to go about getting out of it. Or how he'd gotten into it in the first place.

Mrs. Danner. He hated Mrs. Danner, how he hated that profiteering old female souse! She, if anyone, was responsible for his present situation. She'd evidently known that the apartment was some kind of exit apparatus; when she'd walked in unannounced, she had expected to find the place empty. If only he'd given a little more attention to her gleeful maunderings!

How long had people been noticing that sign outside the tenement entrance? "Three-Room Apartment for Rent. Very Cheap. Immediate Occupancy!"

How many had run in and excitedly paid her the thirty-five dollars "renting-fee" she demanded, then bolted home to gather up enough personal belongings to take formal possession? And then, a few moments after entry, while measuring the bedroom for furniture arrangements perhaps, or considering the walls relative to a daring color scheme idea, or prying loose a badly stuck window—had suddenly

fallen through into this world of magic and violence?

How long had Mrs. Danner been making a good thing out of this apartment, how many "renting-fees" had she acquired? Percy didn't know, but he thought dreamily of coming upon her some time in a locked room. Forgetting his painfully bound hands and feet for a moment, he mused gently on the delightful softness of her throat under a pair of insistent thumbs.

Although she couldn't be the whole answer. She didn't know enough about anything outside of the latest quotations on whiskey-by-the-case-F.O.B.-distillery to have created the peculiar chronological trap that the apartment contained. Who was it then? Or what? And, above all and most important, why?

Dictys had come up, surrounded by his bully-boys in semi-sarongs.

"A bad day," he told the town-folk. "Didn't catch a single solitary horror. Just this fake hero."

"That's all right, Dictys," the man who had previously expressed confidence in the King's thermal reliability reassured him. "He'll still be a good excuse for a party."

"Sure," someone else chimed in. "With an execution, the evening won't be entirely lost."

"I know, I know," Dictys admitted morosely. "But I wanted a specimen for the zoo. An execution won't be the same thing at all."

WHILE MOST of the surrounding individuals applauded the extremely commendable detachment of so scientific an attitude, Percy saw a man with a voluminous white mantle push out to the front of the group and look at him more closely and curiously than anyone else had. The man had a peculiarly bright saffron skin, Percy noticed, when a fold of the cloak came down from his face for a moment.

"What made you think he was a monster?" the man asked Dictys, putting the fold carefully back in place.

"The chest he was riding. From the cliff, it looked like part of him. It was round and white and had all kinds of metal pieces sticking out. I've never seen anything like it before—and I've been to the mainland twice."

"Where is the chest?"

The large man pointed over his shoulder with a thumb the size of a small banana. "Oh, we left it on the cliff with the rest of the stuff he had in it. You can never tell about strange pieces of furniture: sometimes they come alive or burst into flame or—Say! Are you a stranger in town?"

The white-cloaked man dropped a hand to his mid-section. He passed it once across his abdomen and, as Dictys advanced truculently upon him, he disappeared.

There were breaking bubbles of comment all through the crowd.

"What was that?"

"Where in the world did he go, Eupapius?"

"I don't know but, if you ask me, he wasn't all human."

"Mama, I wanna go home!"

"Sh-h-h, Leontis. There may be a cooking today. You wouldn't want to miss that, would you?"

"What do you think he was, Dictys?"

Their leader scratched his matted hair. "Well, he couldn't have been what I thought he was, just an ordinary stranger passing through. I wanted to grab him and put him under arrest. If he was a stranger or a wandering merchant and had forgotten to register with the commander of the palace guard, he'd have been liable to the Foreigner's Penalty Tax."

"You mean all his goods impounded and his right arm burned off before his face?"

"More or less, at the discretion of the guard commander. But I think he must have been either a wizard or a major monster. In fact, from the color of his skin, I'd say he was a human-type monster. Wasn't it gold?"

Agésilas nodded. "It was gold, all right. What they call on the mainland the *Olympian* type of monster. Those aren't supposed to be too bad. According to the mainlanders, they help men lots of times."

"When they help men, it's for their own good reasons," Dictys growled. "Not that I have anything against major monsters," he explained hurriedly to Agésilas. "They have their own private quarrels and men should stay out of them if they don't want to get badly hurt."

FROM THE anxious speed with which he had added the last remark, Percy deduced a certain real fear of what the man called "major monsters". Evidently, minor monsters were something else again, since Dictys had been fishing for them and the king maintained a kind of zoo. But why had the golden-skinned stranger been so interested in him? Had he something to do with Percy's arrival here?

He had long lost all feeling in his wrists and ankles and was wondering dizzily if they intended to keep him hanging in the village square as a kind of permanent decoration, when there was a musical clank of metal armor and an uneven tramping of feet.

A very hoarse voice said, "King Polydectes of Seriphos will see the prisoner now."

Percy sighed with real gusto as two men shouldered his pole again and began jouncing him along the main avenue. Not only was he going to go to a place where his side of the story could be heard at last, but he now knew the name of the island kingdom on which his errant bathtub had stum-

bled so unceremoniously.

Seriphos. He went through his memory rapidly. No, he didn't know anything about an island called Seriphos. Except what he had learned in the past hour or so. That it was fairly close to the Greek mainland and therefore in the warm Aegean Sea. And that it was awaiting the fulfillment of an ancient legend to the effect that the Gorgon-killer Perseus was to land there sometime before starting out on his heroic quest.

Also, that it had a judicial system that bore a close resemblance to a power saw.

He was carried up a single step and into a courtyard with an enormous ceiling supported by four massive pillars of stone. Menon slipped the pole out of the rope loops at his hands and feet, and the other bearer cut his bonds with a few generous slashes of a long bronze knife.

They stood him on his feet and stepped back. "Feel better now?"

Percy pitched forward on his face. He bounced hard on the painted cement floor.

"His legs," Menon explained to his buddy. "They've fallen asleep."

"Always happens," the other said professionally. "Every damn time."

The return of circulation was grim, swirling agony. Percy moaned and rolled about on the floor rubbing his wrists and ankles with hands that felt like wooden boards. A few people came over and squatted down beside him for a moment to stare at his face or watch his struggles. No one offered to help.

After a while, he was able to bow-leg painfully upright. His guards grabbed him and shoved him between them against a pillar.

MOST OF the townspeople had followed him into the hall. The news was spreading, it would seem. Every few moments someone else came

in—butchers with their dripping meat cleavers, peasants with their scythes, women carrying rush baskets filled with berries and vegetables.

The newcomers would have him pointed out to them. Then they would either smile and nod slowly in satisfaction, or they would turn and run out fast, in evident haste to get Cousin Hybrias or Aunt Thea before all the fun was over.

In the middle of the courtyard, beside a blackened hearth roughly the size of the entire apartment which Percy had so recently vacated, a man sat on an enormously wide stone throne.

At first glance, he seemed to be lolling in a large number of strangely shaped cushions. Closer examination, however, revealed the cushions to be a fine collection of young and pretty girls who varied as much in their coloring as they did in their interest in the affairs of state going on before them. One extremely pretty blonde who formed part of the king's footstool was snoringly sound asleep. Another, a gorgeous Negro girl, most of whose body was obscured by a large masculine shoulder, was expostulating vehemently into the monarch's right ear and waving her hand at a moaning figure prostrate before the throne.

"See here, Tontibbi," the king told her at last in a highly exasperated voice, "I've got my own system of punishments and I don't want any decadent females from an over-civilized part of the world to be suggesting changes all the time no matter how imaginative they might be. We're rough-and-ready folk here on Seriphos, and we go in for simple entertainments. And if you African snobs want to go around calling us barbarians, well go right ahead. We're proud of the name."

The dark girl scowled and subsided back into the recesses of the great throne. The assembled crowd applaud-

ed vehemently.

"That's the way, Polydectes. You tell these stuck-up foreigners where to get off!" an elderly farmer cheered.

"Well," Polydectes said slowly and thoughtfully. "The way I see it—why shouldn't what was good enough in my father's day be good enough for me?"

"Don't you just love the way he puts things?" a beaming housewife remarked to her neighbor. "I think it's lovely to have a king who's so clever with words!"

"Besides," her friend replied, "I don't understand all this crazy desire for change all the time. What could be better than disposing of criminals by cooking them over a slow fire? The way King Polydectes' chef does it, we usually get four or five hours out of the weakest man. He starts after supper and by the time he's through it's quite dark and everyone feels like having a good night's sleep after a fine, enjoyable evening. Personally, I wouldn't dream of asking for anything more."

PERCY FELT his stomach turn in a slow, rocking half-circle. The man who was lying before the king screamed a little bit and tried to grind his face into the cement floor.

What kind of people were they anyway? They talked of the most horrible things with the same equanimity as if they might be discussing the latest movie or wrestling match they'd seen the night before on television.

Well, of course, public executions were the closest these people came to such things as movies or television. Percy remembered stories he'd read in the newspapers of crowds turning out to attend hangings in various parts of the United States. That was the twentieth century! And an execution was still a sufficiently fine spectacle for many men to bring their dates, for some women to bring their children and for a few enterprising business-

men to hawk tiny replicas of the gallows on which a fellow-human was frantically kicking his life away.

All of which was well and good, but didn't help him very much in his present predicament. If only he could figure out some approach which these people would honor, if only he could learn a little bit about their ideas of right and wrong in time to do himself some good!

He strained to catch every detail of what was going on. He needed clues as to their courtroom procedure. Would he get a lawyer to defend him? He doubted it from what he'd seen so far. Yet there had been talk of a trial, there had been mention of a jury. There was a little frozen comfort in these civilized institutions no matter how they were applied, he decided.

And then he wasn't so sure.

"I'm getting tired of this," the king broke into the prostrate prisoner's broken-hearted babble. He lifted his head and waved vaguely at the assembled crowd. "Hey, jury! Any of you willing to insist on this man's innocence?"

"Uh-uh. Guilty!"

"Guilty as hell!"

"The low-down beast! Cooking's too good for him. Hey, Brion, what'd he do?"

"How should I know? I just came in. Must have been something bad or he wouldn't be on trial."

"Guilty, guilty, guilty! Let's get on to the next case. That looks good!"

"Raise the prisoner for sentencing," King Polydectes commanded. Two guards leaped forward and lifted the writhing, pleading man. The king pointed a forefinger solemnly at the ceiling. "By virtue of the power vested in me by me," he intoned, "I hereby sentence you to—to...just a minute now. To—"

"To cooking over a slow fire," the

Negro girl behind him said bitterly. "Is it ever anything else?"

Polydectes pounded a barrel-like fist angrily into his open palm. "You better be careful, Tontibbi! You'll go into the kettle yourself if you don't watch out! You might have spoiled the whole legality of the trial! All right, take him away," he said in disgust. "You heard what she said. Do it."

"I'm sorry, Polydectes," the girl murmured contritely. "I get so bored! Go ahead, sentence him yourself."

The king shook his head unhappily. "Naa-a-ah! There's no pleasure in it anymore. Just try to control yourself from now on, huh?"

"I will," she promised, snuggling down again.

AS THEY lifted the vaguely struggling man by his arms, Percy gasped in horror. He understood why he hadn't been able to make out any of the prisoner's words—his tongue had been torn out! There were great drying crusts of blood all over his face and still more coming down his chin to his chest. The man was obviously so weak from loss of blood that he could hardly stand by himself, but so terrified by the agonizing imminence of his doom that he had been desperately trying to make himself understood in some way. His hands waved hopelessly and a dreadful tongueless moan kept rolling out of his mouth as he was dragged, his toes plowing thin furrows in the dust of the floor, off to a small room which was probably the execution antechamber.

"See?" Menon said to Percy who was feebly massaging his belly. "He tried to influence the jury before trial. From what I hear, they were the soldiers."

It began to make a kind of highly disagreeable sense, Percy decided.

Every citizen on the island—soldiers, civilians, policemen, noblemen, whatever—was a potential member of the jury in any criminal case. The fact that these people took the responsibilities of office rather lightly by the standards of the world he had just left was not as important as their right to crowd into any trial and participate in the verdict. Therefore, if you were arrested on Seriphos for an offense, no matter how flimsy the accusation, you must, above all, not protest your innocence. The man who arrested you would be a talesman; and the punishment for violating this particular law was swift and comprehensive. He began to feel a surprising glow of gratitude for the gag that Dictys had stuffed in his mouth. Why, the man had actually been human even though, instead of pulling Percy's tongue out, he had virtually shoved it down his throat!

But how could you defend yourself when people like these brought you to trial?

"Next case!" the king roared. "And let's cut it short. We're all getting hungry and there's a pretty good execution scheduled for after supper. I don't like to keep my people waiting."

"And that's why we call him Good King Polydectes," a woman murmured as Percy was dragged before the throne and flung down hard.

"Charged," a somewhat familiar voice said above his head, "with impersonating a hero, i.e., Perseus, who, according to the legend—"

"I heard the legend, Dictys," his brother said grumpily. "We went all through it in the previous case. Let's find this man guilty too and start to adjourn. I don't know why there are so many Perseus' these days and so few fake Heracles' or Theseus'. I guess it's like anything else; someone starts a fad and before you know what's happened everybody's doing it."

Dictys' curiosity had been aroused. "What do you mean you went all through it in the previous case?"

"Oh, a couple of my soldiers were on duty up on the hills investigating a report that those small-size monsters, the flying ones, you know which I mean...?"

"Harpies?" You mean the ones with heads of girls and the bodies, wings and claws of birds, don't you?"

Polydectes sighed. "Those. It's wonderful to have a brother who knows his monsters so well. I get all mixed up whenever I try to keep them straight in my head. I just have a simple rule: if it has no more and no less than two arms, two legs and one head, then it's human. Otherwise, it's a monster."

"That leaves out the golden-skinned Olympians. They're not human either. I don't know exactly what they are, but a lot of people would classify them with the major monsters."

"And a lot wouldn't," the king pointed out. "So there you are. Where exactly it is that you are, I don't know, but— Anyway, there's been a couple of reports lately that these things, these Harpies, have been smuggling contraband into the island from the air and cutting into the royal revenues of Seriphos. I sent a squad up to Mount Lassus to look into the matter. They were settling down to a little meal before going into action when this man came blundering down the hill. They arrested him as soon as he told them he was Perseus. After they arrested him, of course, and he still tried to argue, they punished him on the spot for jury-tampering under my edict of last summer. Now, I felt they might have been a bit too zealous, but— What is this fellow still doing here? Didn't we find him guilty?"

"Not yet," Dictys assured him. "You haven't asked the jury. But that's all right. I'm in no hurry."

"Well, I am." The monarch spread his hands out at his eager people. "Guilty, eh?"

"Oh, sure!"

"Guilty ten times over!"

"His crimes show in his face, every one of them!"

"Hooray for Just King Polydectes!"

Just King Polydectes beamed. "Thank you, my friends, thank you. Now, as for the sentencing—"

Percy leaped to his feet. "What kind of a trial is this anyway?" he raged. "You might give a man a chance for his life!"

KING POLYDECTES shook his head in amazement. He leaned forward to stare at Percy closely, almost squashing a feminine footstool who had just begun to stretch. He was as large as his brother but, since his waist competed burstingly with his height, the effect was overpowering. Also, while most of the people on the island—male and female—seemed to dress in a negligent sheepskin or sagging loincloth, the two royal brothers wore richly dyed woolen garments and the king sported what must once have been a clean tunic of the finest linen.

"I don't know what's upset you, young fellow, but you've had all the chance for your life that the laws of Seriphos allow. Now, why don't you be quiet about it and take your punishment like a man?"

"Listen, please listen!" Percy begged. "Not only am I not a citizen of Seriphos, but I'm not even a citizen of this world. All I want is the chance of finding a way back, practically anything that—"

"That's the whole point," the king explained. "Our laws are not made for citizens—at least not the ones about cooking over a slow fire. Citizens who go wrong get thrown off cliffs or strangled outside the walls at high noon, things like that. Only non-citizens get punished this way.

This is how I keep my people happy to be under my rule. Now do you understand? Let's not have any more trouble, huh? Let's be grown-up about paying the penalty for our crimes."

Percy grabbed at his hair, pulled out an exasperated clump and jumped on it. "Look, the way this whole thing started—I won't begin with Mrs. Danner—it's impossible, insane to stand here and watch what— Just a minute." He took a deep breath, conscious of the necessity to remain calm, to be very, very persuasive—to be, above all, *reasonable*. "There was a slight misunderstanding when I met your brother. A sea-serpent—" he paused for a moment, took a deep breath and went on "—an honest-to-gosh real sea-serpent came up to me in my—in my floating chest and welcomed me as the son of Danae. So when I was asked by Dictys who I was—"

"You needn't go on," Polydectes advised him. "The testimony of a sea-serpent is not admissible evidence."

"I was not talking—"

"What I mean is, it's not admissible evidence from the sea-serpent himself. So it certainly is not admissible when you repeat it to us."

"All I was trying to say—"

"Of course," the king stuck out his lower lip and nodded his head thoughtfully, "if it was a land serpent, it might be a little different matter."

PERCY PAUSED in the midst of a frantic peroration, intrigued in spite of himself. "It would?" he asked curiously.

"Certainly. Depending on the exact type of land serpent. The oracular type, now, we'd certainly listen to what a pythoness has to say with a good deal of respect. Or the very intelligent and friendly walking kind the legends tell about. But none of this applies to you. You're charged with impersonating Perseus and circulating the impression that you have

the courage to kill the Gorgon. For such a crime, a sea-serpent is no good as a character witness. Besides, you've already been found guilty."

"I'm not even arguing with the idea that—"

"Dictys," the king said with a gesture of infinite weariness. "Rule him out of order."

An enormous fist came down on the top of Perseus' head. He felt as if his brains had been rammed down his nostrils. When he could see clearly again through the reddish haze, he was grabbing at the floor which seemed to be curling away from him.

"I don't see why we can't have two executions the same day," Dictys was saying angrily. "Both of these men claimed to be Perseus. As you said, we've having a regular rash of this impersonation lately. Well, a good way to discourage it would be a slam-bang double cooking. A sort of two-course execution. All you have to do is pass sentence on him now, let me attend to details like getting a slave to clean the pot between acts, and—"

"Who's king around here, me or you?" Polydectes roared.

"Oh, you are, you are. But—"

"No buts. You're just a grand duke and don't you forget it, Dictys. Now, I say we'll have just one execution tonight, the man who was caught first. Then tomorrow, we'll have this man in for an official sentencing. It'll give me another excuse to have a throne-room reception, which I like, and will insure that we'll all have something to keep us cheerful on another night."

"All right," Dictys said morosely. "But how many times does it happen that we get two stew-jobs on the same day?"

"All the more reason for spreading them out over a period of time," the king insisted. "Guards, take this man away! You see, Dictys, the way I feel about it is—waste not, want not."

And that, Percy thought bitterly as two huskies with hands like iron claws

began dragging him out of the pillared chamber, that's why they call him Philosophical King Polydectes!

AT THE end of the hall, a grate was abruptly lifted from the floor and he was dropped into the hole like a handful of garbage. The hole was deep enough to knock him out again.

He managed to roll over on his back after a while, nursing his bruises with aching arms. Whatever else was the matter with it—and that came to a good deal!—this was certainly the least gentle of possible worlds.

There was a little light slanting in from the grate. He started to stagger over to it, to get a somewhat better idea of his cell. Something hit him in the stomach and he sat down again.

"You just try that again, mister," a girl's soft voice told him in definite accents, "and I'll really wreck you."

"I beg your pardon?" Percy asked the dead gloom stupidly.

"Don't worry about my pardon. You just stay on your side of the cell and I'll stay on mine. I've had all I want or am going to take of loose-fingered guys who want to find out how much of what a girl has where and don't think twice of finding out right away. I never saw such a place!" Her voice had been riding up the scale with every word; when she came to the last one, she began crying.

After thinking the matter over carefully, Percy started to crawl in the direction of the sobs. "See here..." he began gently.

This time she hit him in the eye.

Cursing more fluently than he had ever known he could, he moved to the opposite wall and sat down against it with sternly folded arms. After a while, however, the bitterness got to be too much for silence. He began by cursing the entire human race, limited it to women in general and, after a nod at the girl across from him, he concentrated on Mrs. Danner. He put so much feeling into the business that

his maledictions became surprisingly expert, almost worthy of an ecclesiastical body discussing one of their number who had started a campaign to practice the principles of their mutual religion.

He suddenly felt the girl's wet face nuzzling against his shoulder. He leaped into the corner. "Let me tell you, lady," he almost spat out, "that I don't want to touch you any more than—"

"You just mentioned Mrs. Danner's name," she said. "I heard you. Apartment 18-K?"

"Right! But how..." Slowly the answer dawned on him. "Oh, you're an alumnus too!"

"I'll kill that woman!" she said through clenched teeth. "The first day I was here, I said I'd beat every dollar bill and every shot of whiskey that she enjoyed on my money out of her if I ever got back. The second day, I said if I only got back I wouldn't pay any attention to her, I'd be so busy kissing things like city sidewalks and big six-foot cops and plumbing equipment. The third day, I didn't think of her at all, I was so busy trying to remember what it was like in the city. But today I know I'm not going back, not ever, so all I do is pray that somehow I will figure out a way of killing her, that somehow—"

She began crying again, great gusty sobs that sounded as if her shoulders were being torn out of place.

VERY, VERY gingerly, the young man returned to her side and patted her on the back. After a while, he took her in his arms and caressed her face gently. Some terribly rough garment she was wearing irritated his own scratched skin.

"It could be worse," he assured her, although privately he wondered what miracle would be necessary to achieve

that state. "It could be a lot worse, believe me. Meanwhile, we've found each other. Things won't be nearly so bad with someone to talk to. We're compatriots or comtimeriots or something. My name's Percy S. Yuss. The 'S' stands for Sacrist. I used to own half of a restaurant that our creditors owned two-thirds of. Who are you?"

"Anita Drummond," she said, straightening with a slightly self-conscious giggle and wiping her eyes with her peculiar dress. "Ann. I used to be a ballet dancer. Or, rather, I was still studying to be one, getting a little work here and there. That apartment was a godsend. It just fitted my budget. I plumped myself down in the one chair the place had and gloried in a home at last! Then I noticed a piece of parchment on the floor with some poetry on it. I started to read it, stopped, and then began to doze with my eyes on the words. When I woke, I was halfway up a plowed hillside, the chair didn't have any legs, and some old peasant and his wife were saying spells over me to make me vanish before I put a charm on their crops. As soon as they saw me open my eyes, they both jumped on my head, tied me down and carried me into their hut. And they wouldn't listen to a word I had to say! Uh—by the way, if you want to—to be a little more presentable, there's a pile of castoff clothes in that corner there."

Percy ambled over and found a half-dozen badly worn sheepskin tunics. He selected one which smelled strongly but seemed to have fewer inhabitants than the others, and came back. Somehow, wearing clothes again helped restore his confidence. He hadn't had much opportunity to think about the various aspects of nudism since his arrival *sans* wardrobe in this thoroughly mad world, but he felt for the first time that there was a possibil-

ity of outwitting his captors now that he was dressed almost as well as they.

ANN CONTINUED her story. She was describing how all the inhabitants of a village on the far side of the island had been called into a conference on methods of disposing of the witch.

"There was a real tug-of-war going on between the drive-a-stake-into-her-and-be-done-with-it school and the burn - her - and - then - only - then - can - you - be - sure faction, when a seneschal or chamberlain or whatever he was of King Polydectes court happened to pass by. He was out hunting some small monsters. Furies, I think. Or perhaps they were Sirens. He saw me and before any of the village could say anything, he—Percy, look!"

He jerked his head around to follow her pointing finger. Dusk had been sliding down over the grating at a steeper and steeper incline. There was little more than the most delicate of rosy glows from a sun which had done more than its share of shining and wanted only to rest.

There was a man's head on the other side of the grating. His fingers pressed hard upon his lips. Percy nodded to show that he understood. Slowly the man faded, like smoke dissipating under a gentle summer breeze. Then he was gone.

But the grate lifted slowly, silently, and closed again in a moment. Percy had the eerie sensation of something very heavy that was floating down in the lazy circles that a feather would assume. Without thinking about it, he covered Ann's mouth with his own hand. Even so, her gasp was almost audible when, abruptly, a man wearing a suit vaguely reminiscent of renaissance Italy appeared before them.

He made an adjustment on the extremely thick metal-studded belt he

wore, gave them the slightest inclination of his head by way of greeting, and said: "My name is Hermes."

Ann removed Percy's hand from her mouth. "Hermes!" she whispered. "The messenger of the gods!"

"Exactly."

The smile came and went so fast on that aristocratic face that Percy was not quite sure it had ever been. He stared closely at the man's visible skin in the almost non-existent light. It looked golden. "Weren't you the fellow in the white mantle who disappeared when Dictys began asking you questions?"

HERMES NODDED. "I suspected who you were, but I had to check on the so-called chest before I could be sure. I could hardly ask you questions while you were surrounded by that mob."

"What questions?" Percy asked eagerly.

"Questions which would determine whether you were the rightful Perseus, the legendary hero who is to save the world from the Gorgon race."

"Look, mister, that stuff has me in enough hot water already! My name is Percy S. Yuss. I am not the son of Danae—we never even had a Daniel in the family anywhere. I don't know this Gorgon everyone keeps raving about all the time and, if I did, I certainly wouldn't feel like killing her. I have nothing against any Gorgon, or any man—except for that fat old slob of king—"

"You're speaking too loudly," the other warned. "It's not any Gorgon we send you against—it's Medusa herself!" His voice dropped almost to inaudibility at the name. "I spoke to Professor Gray and described the articles with which you had arrived, and he agreed that you must be a man of his own time."

"You mean there's someone else here from the twentieth century?"

Ann asked eagerly.

"Where is he? In trouble too?" Percy inquired. He was slightly bitter.

The stranger smiled. This one was long and slow, and Percy decided he didn't like it any better than the fast take. "No, he's not in trouble. He's waiting for you to give you advice on how best to conquer the Gorgon."

"Well, he'll have to run pretty far and awfully fast. I don't like the way everyone jumps when they mention that character. I don't feel like a hero and I don't intend to be one. I've been a sucker all my life, always taking somebody else's falls, but this is one that my mother's favorite son is not going to take."

"Not even to avoid the stew-pot tomorrow?"

Percy swallowed. He'd forgotten the trial according to the laws of Seriphos since he had met Ann. Yes. There'd be another evening like this one, and then he'd be led out—

Could any risk he'd run be greater than the horrible certainty he faced in twenty-four hours? He'd seen enough of these ancient Greeks to have developed a very healthy respect for their deadly efficiency in the prosecution of what they considered to be criminal cases. It was very doubtful, for example, that these people had developed the institution of appeal, or parole....

"Not even," Hermes went on, picking each word up carefully with his teeth and holding it out for them to see, "not even for the chance to return to your own time?"

Ann squealed and the messenger of the gods sternly told her to be quiet. He jerked at his belt, went invisible. After a while, he turned back on. When he rematerialized, he was staring anxiously up at the grating, one hand poised over his belt.

IT STRUCK Percy that this fellow was pretty nervous for a supposed deity. It also struck him that he was being offered just what he needed im-

mediately and most desperately wanted. Did the price he had to pay sound too high? That was silly. Whatever he had to do would be worth the risk and difficulty, if somehow he could find himself back in his own era. Not to mention the desirable aspects of getting out of his present surroundings before supper-time tomorrow.

"I'll do it," he said finally. "Whatever it is you want done, I'll do it. Only listen. Any bargain I made applies to this girl as well as to me."

"Done!" The golden one held out a thin pouch. "Take this. When they lead you to execution tomorrow—"

"Hey! I thought you were going to get us out of this jam. Why can't you just take us with you?"

Hermes shook his head violently. He seemed to be extremely interested in moving on as soon as possible. "Because I can't. You don't have the powers. Do what I tell you and you'll be all right."

"Listen to him, Percy!" Ann urged. "This is our only chance. Let's do it his way. Besides, he's a god. He must know his way around this mythological world."

Again Hermes smiled that quick-flitting smile. "When they take you out, make a long speech—as long as you can—about how sorry they are going to be. Whatever it is they're going to have you fight—"

"I'm not going to fight anything," Percy insisted. "I'm going to be—"

"Cooked over a slow fire. I know! But believe me, trust me, you will be led out to fight somebody or something. You make your speech and while you're talking, without anyone seeing you, you dip your hand under your garment and into this pouch. Start fondling the kernels you find there, squeeze them, rub them back and forth between the palm of your hand and the fabric of the pouch. When they start to squirm and move about of their own, get sent in and start fighting as soon as possible! All you do then is to scatter them on the

ground all around you—and stand back! Get back as far as—”

He stopped and ripped at the switch on his belt. A torch appeared on the other side of the grating and two heavily whiskered men peered in.

“Could have sworn I saw something,” one of them said.

“Well, you can call the guard out and go down to look into it,” the other one announced. “Me for the party.”

The torchbearer straightened. “Me too. If I saw what I thought I did, I don’t want to look into it! Let the morning watch do it.”

OUT OF THE darkness came the pouch and pushed itself into Percy’s hand. “Remember,” they heard the whisper ascending slowly. “Don’t start rubbing those kernels too early—and don’t wait too long either. Once they begin moving, you’ve got to get into the light fast.”

The grate lifted briefly, came down again. There was a final whispered injunction: “And don’t look into the pouch tonight! Don’t even think of touching it until just before you have to!”

They felt a presence departing stealthily above them. Ann moved closer to Percy and he squeezed her reassuringly.

“A big list of don’ts,” he grumbled. “Time it just right, but don’t try to find out what it is! It’s like taking a Frenchman up to a row of medicine bottles labeled in Chinese and warning him to take some aspirin before his fever goes up any further, but not to touch the sleeping tablets because they’re strong enough to kill him. What does he think I am?”

Ann leaned on him, chuckling with a slight edge of hysteria. “Do you know, Percy, this is the first, absolutely the first ray of hope I’ve seen since coming to this awful world? And you’re grumbling because the directions aren’t so clear!”

“Well, after all,” his mind said logically—but privately!—“I’m the one

who’s going to have to fight the Gorgon!”

“I’m not really complaining,” he said aloud as they sat down. “But confused directions irritate me. I always feel I’m being taken for a ride.”

“Think of sitting in a restaurant,” she murmured dreamily. “Or a hairdresser’s. Think of going to those chic little dress shops along the Avenue and feeling all those wonderful fabrics and imagining yourself in all those lovely new styles. And all the time making believe that you’re really fooling the sales girl into believing you have enough money to buy them. And any time a man you don’t like makes a pass at you, you can make him stop. And if he doesn’t stop, you yell, and when you yell, you get help instead of him. Oh, civilization, civilization!”

She was asleep in his arms. Percy patted her tenderly and prepared to go to sleep himself. He’d had a long, tiring day. Long? Just three thousand years or so!

Unfortunately, he hadn’t fallen completely asleep when the execution started. Being underground somewhat and a good distance away, he couldn’t see very much. But a good deal of the noise carried....

IT WAS QUITE a few hours before he finally dozed off and stopped thinking about the man who had come charging down a hillside insisting he was Perseus. How many Perseus’ were there in this world? It looked almost as if someone wanted the Gorgon killed very badly indeed and was sending in a good many pinch-hitters.

Who was the real Perseus? He didn’t know, but it struck him then that he did know he wasn’t. And he was the only one committed so far to killing the Gorgon. What, exactly, was the Gorgon? That was another good question....

Their cell had a third occupant by morning. Agesilaus.

“What did you do?” Percy asked

him as he stretched painfully.

"Nothing," the old man said. He sat against the wall hunting for lice in his beard. Every time he caught one, he grinned and cracked it noisily between his teeth. "I'm here because of my brother."

"What do you mean because of your brother?"

"He committed high treason last night and had his brains knocked out according to the law the king made up a few minutes after he committed it. The king was still pretty sore, though, so he passed another law making all blood relatives co-responsible in cases of high treason. I was the only blood relative, so here I am. I'm due to get my brains knocked out today."

"Good old 'waste not, want not' Polydectes," Percy mused. "What kind of high treason did your brother commit that the king had to pass a law covering it?"

Agesilaus pored through the bottom tattered fringes of his beard. From the obvious disappointment with which he put them aside, it was clear that he considered them devoid of life. "Well, sir, my brother was the royal chef. So of course he was also the public executioner. Somewhere along the line, he must have made a mistake last night. He probably forgot to grease it properly. Because after the execution, the great cooking pot cracked."

"Cracked? You mean they can't use it any more?"

"That's just what I do mean. Broke open like a nut. Ah, you can smile, but let me tell you—that pot was the pride of Seriphos! It wasn't made of bronze or silver or gold, but—and I don't ask you to believe this—of pure *iron*! Yes, sir, this whole island wouldn't be wealthy enough to buy another pot like that. Years and years it took, in my great-grandfather's day, melting down those little meteors that our people had been collecting for generations. And at that they say it was

one of the walking reptiles that finally did the casting. Do you blame King Polydectes for getting mad at my brother and all his kith and kin? I don't. Why, his predecessor, King Aurion—the one Polydectes stabbed in the back at the feast of the summer solstice—Aurion would have extended the penalties to relatives by marriage and most of the criminal's close friends."

PERCY SAT musing on Hermes' prediction of the night before. In all probability, it was not so much an example of accurate prophecy as a clear case of sabotage. He chuckled. Well, at least that particular fear was no longer to be lived with!

"What were these walking reptiles?" Ann asked. She'd been sitting quietly by Percy's side all through his interrogation of the old man, and had pressed his hand when he chuckled to show that she too was hoping that the rest of Hermes' promises would be realized.

"That's a hard question to answer," Agesilaus said slowly. "They must have died off completely forty, fifty years ago. In my great-grandfather's day, there were very few of them left, and they got fewer all the time. They were like the pythonesses who work with the oracles or some of the friendlier sea-serpents. But they were smarter than any of them. And they had legs—some say they even had arms—and they walked about and performed wonders. Taught us how to make pottery, my grandfather told me, and how to—"

"Hey, Agesilaus!"

They all looked up to see the rope ladder come twirling down into the cell. The burly man at the top gestured impatiently to the new arrival. "Time for boom-boom. Hurry up, will you? There's going to be a bull-baiting this afternoon and we have to clear up the arena."

"Their lives are certainly one mad

round of pleasure," Ann said bitterly to Percy. "Something doing all the time!"

"Don't misunderstand us," the old man pleaded as he began to mount the ladder. "We have entirely too many people on this island and there haven't been any wars or serious pestilences for over two generations now. What better way to cut down our numbers than by interesting executions? Polydectes calls this 'Population Control with a Smile.'"

"He would," Percy muttered. "That's why we call him Humorous King Polydectes."

LATER, HE was ordered up the rope ladder in his turn and sentenced to combat in the theater with such monsters as would be made available by the zoo superintendent. Polydectes was evidently too morose to develop much interest even in the throne-room reception which a sentencing made inevitable. He lounged sideways on his concubine-infested seat, scowling at the wall, while a court official lackadaisically informed Percy of what he was to expect.

He was sitting thoughtfully in the execution ante-chamber touching the pouch under his sheepskin tunic from time to time, when Ann was hurled in.

"Monster-bait too," she nodded at him. "They're going to send us in together. Let us hope and pray that Hermes knows what he's talking about."

"How come you're under sentence too? What did you do? Not that you can't be tossed into Condemned Row for just making the serious error of being alive."

"Well, you see, I was brought here originally from the other side of the island to become a part of Polydectes' harem."

"How did you get out of that?"

"I didn't get out of it. I'm afraid I just didn't make the grade. The king said I wasn't pneumatic enough. Although," she added with a vicious snap of her teeth. "I still think it was

that jealous cat Tontibbi that poisoned his mind against me. Oh no, you don't have to look so startled, Percy," she laughed. "I didn't want to be a member of that harem at all. But it kind of hurts a girl's feelings to be told she's not good enough, when she sees all kinds of fat and sloppy creatures positively infesting the place!" She curled up beside him, still fuming.

In the late afternoon, they were given a handful of dried fruits and, while they were still munching this highly uninteresting supper, were ordered out for execution.

PERCY WAS intrigued to see Ann for the first time in daylight. He noted with approving interest that she was one of those rare and perfect blondes whose skin is so magnificently clear as to neutralize the brightness of her hair into an over-all glow of fairness which yet leaves rich hints of darker tones and deeper wells of personality beneath.

They clasped hands as they marched along a constantly curving lane that meandered around the hill on the far side of the citadel. It came eventually to a collection of stone buildings that was obviously the zoo. They were hurried past this, both of them quite happy to be moving fast after a hurried glimpse of what the cages contained. They found themselves in a small valley formed by several tiny hills.

There were seats carved out of the soil of the hills; most of these were already filled. Percy was almost certain he saw Hermes in one of the seats. At the bottom of the valley an area had been surrounded by a high stone wall. There were ponderous gates on either side.

Ann and Percy were alternately pushed and led to one of these gates which was tended by a pair of jumpy youths who held it slightly ajar. Percy nervously reached for the hidden pouch. Everyone was waiting for the king.

He arrived finally, accompanied by his twittering retinue. "Let the punishment proceed," he said in a flat, tired voice. It was evident that he expected little of life now that the execution pot was gone.

Percy dipped his left hand into the pouch as a green-coated bronze sword was shoved into his right. The two boys started to pull the gates back. "I think you'd better start," Ann whispered.

He nodded. "O mighty King Polydectes of Seriphos!" he howled so suddenly that one of the youths dropped his door-ring and turned to run. The Captain of the Guard pushed him back sternly. "I beg and implore you to grant me one last favor." The *kernel*s were disagreeably soft to the touch.

Polydectes waved a hand unhappily. "If it's reasonable. And if you can tell me in just a few more or less well-chosen words." He leaned back irritably.

Grinding the soft little bits slowly between his fingers and against the fabric of the pouch, Percy wondered how, where, to begin. Suddenly he smiled.

"You are probably wondering whether what happened to your execution pot yesterday was an accident, or whether some discontented subject was responsible for destroying the glory of Seriphos. I alone know the answer, and my request hinges on that."

"He's hooked!" Ann whispered delightedly. "Perfect, Percy, perfect!" A buzz of excitement had ripped up and down the theater's earthen rows.

"Well," the young man went on, massaging and squeezing inside the pouch as if he were a prizefighter trying to build up the powers of his fist, "let us examine what probably happened in terms of the basic function of the pot—cooking. What do we know of the effects of previous ingredients upon the structure of the

pot? Do we know anything."

THE KING looked confused and anxious at the same time, as if he felt that Percy had made a very important point but didn't know precisely what he had made it out of. Even the guards who surrounded them had the half-thrilled, half-frightened appearance of men who believe they stand on the brink of tremendous revelation. Percy was not quite certain whether he had felt a ripple of life on his fingertips; he decided, after a moment of waiting, that he hadn't, and continued rolling *non sequiturs*:

"Well, first of all we have sandwiches. On the menu, made to order and to go. We have various kinds of cheese sandwiches. Grilled cheese, cheese and tomato, cheese and bacon, cheese and ham. We can grill them together or separately."

He stopped as he felt a few of the tiny little lumps begin to curl around his fingers.

"If what you're trying to tell me," the king said slowly and intently, "is that my people have been illegally using the state execution pot for grilling cheese and tomato—"

"I'm not trying to tell you anything," Percy said curtly. "Let's get on with the execution."

"No, listen son," Polydectes said warmly, "you were making sense. It was a little hard to follow, but you had a good solid point there. Somewhere, anyway. Please go on."

"Yes, do go on," one of the spectators called out. "I can understand you."

"There's nothing to understand!" He was feeling desperate. The *kernel*s were leaping about in the pouch like tiny frogs frightened out of their pond. "I have nothing to tell you. I made everything up. I just wanted a delay. Now will you go on with the execution?"

"We will not!" the king said portentously. "You're trying to protect

somebody. Somebody Important."

The little writhing bits were now grouped at the mouth of the pouch, burrowing out to freedom. Percy looked at Ann's anxious face, saw that she understood his predicament but had no way to help him.

"Listen, Polydectes," he said hoarsely. "Why don't you give the throne to someone who's deserved it from away back? Tontibbi would make a better ruler several times over. Not only is she smarter than you, not only does she know more about civilized living, but she also—"

"Open those gates," roared Purple King Polydectes, "and throw him to the beast!"

THE GREAT portals creaked back. Ann and Percy were pushed out into the enormous sweep of stone floor. Ann managed to keep her balance, but Percy, thrown off by the arm he had been keeping under his tunic where the pouch lay against his breast, staggered forward unable to lift his head and regain his equilibrium. He tripped and came crashing down on one hand and one knee, his sword ringing on the flagstone as it spun out of his grip.

He heard Ann scream in disbelief and looked up. Racing toward them from the other gate was something that belonged on an insane artist's drawing board and nowhere else.

Waist-high it was, but over twelve feet wide, a weirdly fused conglomeration of canine, lupine, reptile, human and something else, something, Percy immediately felt, that this planet had never bred. The thing ran on the bodies of snakes, lizards, dogs and wolves, all of them seemingly independent living entities and all of them nonetheless joined to the main body by thick trunk-like appendages which took the place of their hind ends. Six distinct heads the thing had, each of them, including the human one, with dripping jaw thrown wide

open and screaming an unrecognizable counterpoint to each other.

It was moving terribly fast. Percy leaped to his feet and, withdrawing the handful of writhing lumps from the pouch, darted toward the terrified girl.

He pulled her behind him before making his throw. A gaping crocodile mouth which had been wavering toward them was abruptly withdrawn as one of the bites fell upon it. Percy managed to throw them in a rough semi-circle, then, pushing Ann ahead, stumbling, bouncing against her and running in crazy zig-zags because of the looks he kept throwing over his shoulder, he made it to the opposite wall.

They stood awed at the destruction they had let loose.

The little lumps had been kernels all right. But of such plants as only the most unholy gardener could have sown!

WHEREVER THE seeds touched a surface, they grew—grew luxuriantly! And in a matter of seconds had put forth on their sickly white stems elephant-sized white flowers covered with irregular purple blobs. Their roots tore into and through the surface contacted like streams of flood water irresistibly seeking their way. Tremendously hungry the roots had to be to support such fantastic growth in the rest of the plant and tremendously hungry they were. Whatever they touched died on the spot—flesh grew bloodless, normal plants turned yellow with sudden age and lack of chlorophyll, the very stone flaked and crumbled into fine dust under the probing requisitions of the sprouting root hairs.

They grew, these seeds, with the maintained momentum and direction in which Percy had thrown them. They reproduced by means of single new seeds virtually expectorated ahead by each fruitful flower.

The monster, which had turned to

run, was engulfed in mid-stride and dropped in a moment—a pallid husk. The walls of the stadium, too—those on the side at which Percy had thrown the seeds—were powdered ruins in a moment. And the entire audience, after a horrified moment of half-understanding, had risen and fled before this botanical juggernaut.

They could have stayed. It hardly reached the top rows.

Almost, it seemed, a moment after it had started to live, it became moribund. It was as if, tremendously hungry of life, it could find in this place or this world no life on which to feed, nothing whose constitution was what it needed to sustain itself. By the time



The seeds which Percy threw sprouted immediately—into a horrifying monster

that the forward blossoms were pluming open among the rapidly emptied seats, their ancestors of seconds ago on the stadium floor had turned a brittle black and begun to fall apart.

In a few minutes, except for the transparent outline of the monster lying near the dissolved gate which it had been vainly trying to regain, and the completely disintegrated length of wall over which the blossoms had passed, there was no sign of the weapon which Hermes had given Percy. A thin grey fog wandered away blindly—and that was all.

There was the abrupt sound of heels striking the ground. They turned. Hermes appeared, a slightly mocking smile on his expertly carved face.

"Well?" he asked. "Was that satis-

factorily efficient, Perseus?"

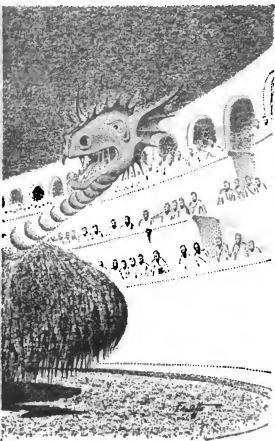
"My name is Percy," the young man told him shortly. "And with that kind of power I don't see why you don't go after the Gorgon yourself."

"Your name, for the duration of this bargain, my friend, is Perseus as far as the Olympians are concerned. With regard to power," he shrugged, "there are many different kinds. Some so old that they can be conquered only at the cost of universal destruction. Some so new," he smiled brilliantly at the two of them, "that their scope cannot as yet even be estimated. And there is the power of a legend which says a truth that must be fulfilled before the days of a world can further unwind." He nodded, in what seemed to be a prodigious self-satisfaction. "Now, if you two would kindly clasp my waist from either side, we can go on."

THE THOUGHT occurred to Percy that he was remarkably cool and chipper away from the dungeons of King Polydectes. The touch of aristocratic insolence in his manner was much deeper now than it had been the previous night when he had broken it frequently to gnaw a nervous lip at the grating above. With weapons such as he had at his disposal, why should he worry about the soldiers of a monarch as petty as Polydectes?

Could it be because the weapons were very limited in quantity and could be used only for emergencies—or to make such important bargains with people like himself as the Olympians deemed necessary? And why was it necessary to make bargains with a master hash-slinger like Percy S. Yuss? For all of Hermes' chatter about different kinds of power, it still seemed much more logical for the Olympians to knock off Medusa themselves than to provide an ordinary human with the weapons to do it.

If they could provide the weapons



to do it. If they could...

He shook his head in bewilderment and grabbed Hermes' waist as Ann had already done, his arms overlapping hers. The golden one flexed his shoulders for a moment, then touched the belt lightly.

They rose, not abruptly, but with the steady insistence of a warm up-draft. At two or three hundred feet, Hermes made another adjustment and began skimming south at a fair rate of speed. It wasn't difficult to maintain a grip and, since the late day was extremely mellow, this particular kind of flight was very enjoyable. Percy and Ann smiled, "Fun, isn't it?" at each other.

"This is some kind of anti-gravity belt, isn't it?" Percy asked.

Hermes gave him a brief, cold glance. "Don't ask such questions!" he said with the insulting emphasis of an order. He flexed his shoulders again and stared straight ahead.

Percy bit his lip. He definitely didn't like this character....

They came down on a little peninsula on the southern tip of Seriphos. There, beside a long rock-like shelf that overhung the sea, was a small and neat hut built of driftwood. After separating themselves from Hermes, the two stood uncertainly on the path for a moment.

"Professor Gray," called out the golden man, "Your fellow-tourists!"

A highly energetic little old man dressed in a grey flannel suit came prancing out of the hut. "Hello, hello!" he said chirpingly. "Come inside, please do. I've been waiting quite a while for you, young fellow. Thank you very much Hermes, you'll be back tomorrow?"

"If we can get the boots working right." The messenger shot up and away at several times the speed he had used in bringing them there.

PROFESSOR GRAY took a hand of each and hauled them into his hut. "Now, sit down and make yourselves

comfortable. Dinner will be ready in a moment." He indicated a full-bellied pot bubbling in the fireplace. Percy, remembering another such pot and noticing the resemblance in all but size, smiled wryly.

"What is it?" the other man asked. Despite his age, he had the quick gestures of a highly nervous sparrow. "What are you brooding about? You must tell me all your adventures, both of you."

So they did. All through dinner.

"I'm sorry. Truly sorry." Professor Gray had his hands shoved deeply into his pockets. "I had no idea—no idea at all—that my little experiment would be dragging fellow humans into such misery. My deepest apologies to both of you, especially the young lady," he asserted self-consciously. "And I certainly didn't intend to present Mrs. Danner with the equivalent of a lifetime pension."

"What little experiment?" Percy asked curiously.

"You mean to tell us that you were the first one through?" Ann asked, her eyes very wide.

"I'm afraid I mean just that." The little man walked bouncingly up and down the length of the small hut. "You see, when I retired as Head of the Classics Department at the University, I rented that apartment as a sort of laboratory. I felt it was the place where I might try some experiments with my theories of subjective time-travel, theories based more upon the ancient Greek philosophers than on our modern mathematicians. There, I thought I'd be alone, safe at least from ridicule. The only thing I didn't anticipate quite so early was my success! Simply because it is a period about which little is known by our archaeologists, I fixed my psyche during the experiment upon the time of the *older heroes*, so called. For the purpose, I used a poem by Pindar, written nine centuries after the period

in which I was interested. I copied an English translation of the poem on a piece of sheepskin, to create greater subjective verisimilitude. I didn't have any warning, either, the day I sat down to try just another experiment in mental control of time."

HE GRINNED at them, gestured with both palms. "Much to my surprise, I—well, I fell in! I was more fortunate than either of you in that I had a plentiful supply of silver and copper coins when I arrived in the southern, less densely populated half of the island. It was inevitable that I should arrive in Seriphos, by the way, because of the poem celebrating Perseus' return here after he had acquired the Gorgon's head that I had used as a psychic time-travel tie. I was able to develop a reputation as a kind of beneficent local wizard through my knowledge of the people and the time. And I've done fairly well for a scholar most of whose adult life has been spent in other places than the press and scramble of business: I own this hut and a substantial tract of productive land. By the standards of this community, I am quite a wealthy man.

"But there is my greatest compensation here—the close, on-the-spot study of a period which has always fascinated me. I place it, by the way, somewhere between the end of the Mycenaean and the beginning of the Achaeon eras of Greek history. Roughly 1400 B.C. It was a remarkable time in that, while superstition flourished, religion—important both before and after this period—was almost nonexistent. Some scholars even claim—"

"Pardon me, sir," Percy broke in, "but how did we come to follow you?"

"I think the answer is obvious. The parchment, containing the English translation of the poem which served

me as a kind of target, was still in the apartment. So, therefore, was my subjective aura. And there had also been created what might be called a psycho-chronological hole in the place through which I had fallen. You young people were unfortunate enough to read the poem under these conditions and therefore followed me, arriving more or less in my neighborhood, depending on personality differences in relation to the psycho-chronological hole. I think the apartment should be fairly safe now, since Percy had the parchment in his hand when he arrived and dropped it in the Aegean Sea."

"And here we are," Percy mused. "In the world of Greek mythology."

Professor Gray shook his head emphatically. "I beg your pardon, but we most definitely are not. There never was such a place! It's entirely a world in Man's imagination. You are in a time that is to give rise to what we call Greek mythology. The actual events in this era will be the religion and mythos of the next. What form exactly they will take, I cannot say, since this is not our world nor our universe."

"What do you mean?" Percy's question was fringed with sudden panic.

"I MEAN THAT you aren't in the past at all. You are in the future, uncountable eons in the future! This is the formative period of Greek mythology on another Earth, in a space-time universe which came into being only after our own grew senile and died. Much the same things are happening to it and on it as happened to our own planet but, since it is not the same Earth, the results tend to be more and more different."

"The—the future?" Ann shook her head as if to clear it of accumulating webs. "Another space-time universe?"

"Is it really so hard to understand or believe? It isn't possible to travel backwards in time, only ahead of one's era. The past, having died, is dead forever: only the future is constantly unrolling. Since I hurled myself into this particular period which, being in the past, had ceased to exist, I inevitably materialized in a parallel period in the succeeding cosmos. The ancient philosopher Anaximander of Miletus was one of the first to discuss the concept of an *Indefinite-Infinite* from which all things were drawn, including primordial atoms and planetary systems, super-galaxies and even time-streams. There is birth and death in all things, said Anaximander, and they perish into those from which they have been born. Thus there were Earths in space-time universes which existed long before our own and, barring unexpected developments in Anaximander's Indefinite-Infinite, there will be Earths in many, many succeeding space-time universes."

"And in each one," Percy muttered slowly as he began to understand. "In each one, another Perseus."

"Right!" Professor Gray beamed. "Except that he does not necessarily do the same things in the same way each time. But enough of this metaphysics! You young people are exhausted: suppose I show you to your beds. You begin a training program tomorrow, Percy—you, especially, will need your sleep."

He led Ann up a ladder into a narrow bedroom in the loft which, after her recent accommodations, she found magnificent. Percy and he bedded down near the fireplace on a soft pile of skins.

"Look, professor," Percy asked as the older man extinguished the torch, "if this isn't a world of actual mythology, then those babies aren't really gods and monsters. Yet, I saw a monster in the arena which I'd like

to forget for the sake of my dreams, and I can remember other things which are even harder to explain."

"Of course. And if that thing—it was a scylla, by the way—had caught you— But while they are real, painfully so, they don't come from our universe at all."

"How's that?"

"There are universes which adjoin ours in the plenum. Every possible type of universe exists parallel with ours. Many of them have Earth-type planets and Sol-type suns positioned in their space to correspond with ours. Well, it happens that the sub-spatial fabric separating these universes from each other is understandably weak in their youth and grows progressively stronger as the ages pass. At one time, there was probably a constant exchange and pilgrimage of individuals taking place from one universe's 'Earth' to another. Right now, it is down in all probability to the barest of trickles as the sub-spatial fabric has solidified and lets little through in any place. In a little while, it will have closed or clotted completely and all that will be left will be the memories of strange unearthly creatures to generate beautiful legends and peculiar superstitions."

PERCY GRUNTED as he chewed into the strange texture of this information. "Then the gods aren't gods at all, I guess, but what I heard one of the men who captured me call them: Olympian monsters."

"Well, yes. Monsters, in the sense that they are nonhuman intrinsically since they evolved on a different world. But, Percy, they are very like us in so many ways! They are much more advanced scientifically at this point than is our race, and they can't be as confusingly horrible in their thought processes—no matter how

bad they might get!—as—well, the Gorgon race for example. These creatures are humanoid: they therefore must come from a world and universe whose natural laws are much like our own: and they are very much interested in helping humanity advance to their level. The people of this time call them Olympian monsters, by the way, because in our world they originate upon Mount Olympus in Northern Thessaly.

"I owe the one called Hermes a good deal: if it hadn't been for his help, I wouldn't have nearly a third of the wealth and knowledge I do. He sought me out shortly after I arrived and insisted on doing all sorts of useful little favors. I'll admit to feeling the same sort of distrust for a while which, I can see, you are experiencing. But believe me, it will be washed away by the fellow's ubiquitous friendliness! I just can't understand why later myths gave him the character of a mischievous schemer! Of course, it's entirely possible that the myths which will evolve in this world will be greatly different from the ones in our own." He nodded to himself gravely, with his head cocked at an angle, as if he were enviously imagining the kind of Greek myth with which some future Professor of Classics should have to deal.

"The Gorgon race is pretty bad in comparison, huh? If I'm going to chase over to—to—"

"Crete. Their headquarters is on the island of Crete."

"Well, can you give me some idea of what they're like?"

PROFESSOR GRAY sat up, supporting his chin on his knees with his cupped hands. "I can, but please remember that what I know is a combination of archaeo-anthropological data and what I have learned about present conditions from Hermes. Al-

most all the more disgusting monsters, he has explained, are properly speaking members of the Gorgon race who are themselves, however, basically reptile. The Gorgons derive from a universe or universes so different from our own even in the laws of biology and chemistry as to be virtually beyond our comprehension. Their chief-tainness, for example, has a human body and a head covered with writhing snakes. Which jibes, of course, with the description of Medusa in almost all the texts."

"The only thing," he said, his delicate old face wrinkling suddenly, "that bothers me a little is the exact relationship of Medusa to the cult of the Snake-Goddess or All-Mother of ancient, matriarchal Crete. In fact, by middle Mycenaean times—just before the present era—the religion of the Triple Goddess, as she was then called, was being practiced over almost the entire Mediterranean by priestesses who not only dominated the community but had control of all agriculture and most of local industry. In the records of our world, this religion disappeared suddenly, to be replaced by the Olympic pantheon. Yet, here, in a parallel transitional period, some two centuries before the Homeric heroes, there is no sign of either religion. Very strange. Possibly neither has developed as yet; although I would give a good deal to see what conditions are like on Crete. Hermes tells me that since the Gorgons have been crowding in, the island is far too dangerous to visit on a purely social basis. Yet—Yet—"

"And then there's the question of the Gorgons' reptilian form. Among the majority of ancient peoples, the serpent was the symbol of wisdom and fertility. Not until the Genesis of our Bible do we find a less flattering picture of the snake and, even then, he is still incredibly shrewd and cun-

ning, though no longer friendly to Man. Is it possible, now—"

PERCY, EXHAUSTED by his first two days in pre-Achaean Greece, fell asleep at this point, to dream that he was back in his own time and a clever, fast-talking salesman named Lucifer Beelzebub Hermes had talked him into buying a very expensive restaurant which, upon his assuming ownership, turned out to have a clientele composed exclusively of rattlesnakes who insisted on charging their meals. When he approached one of them with a suggestion that a part of the long-standing bill be paid, the creature lunged at him with an enormous and rapidly-growing set of triple poison fangs.

He was rather bitter when he woke up, even though Ann had prepared a tasty breakfast out of some local bread and cheese and five eggs from as many different types of birds. Also, Professor Gray had laid out some fairly good garments for them.

The fact remained that whatever Medusa was, however dangerous the Gorgons were, he, Percy Sacrist Yuss, was committed to ridding the world of them and would probably, in the process, rid the world of himself.

"Some people," he told Ann morosely, "have lots of different talents. I have only one—being a sucker. But I'm the best sucker, the most complete sucker, that this world—or the one before it—has ever seen. I'm actually a genius at it."

"The trouble with you," she said, surveying him judiciously over an extremely well-designed water jug, "is that you think about yourself too much."

"Well, it's a good idea while there's still enough of me left around to make it worthwhile."

Professor Gray trotted in and insisted on Percy's coming out to test the

weapons which Hermes had been bringing for the encounter with the Gorgon. Reluctantly, Percy followed him outside into the still, strong brightness of a morning in the Eastern Mediterranean.

"This is the cap of darkness or invisibility," the little man said, handing him a collection of curved metal plates welded in a rough hemisphere and decorated with many wires and incredibly tiny transformers. "The switch is just under the brim—here!—but you'll have to be very careful about practicing with it since Hermes tells me its power supply is very low and there is little possibility of refueling for a long while. Don't gape like that, Percy, it really does work! I told you that their science was far ahead of ours."

He reached into the large wicker basket for a black object shaped like an overnight zipper bag. It had a long, looping handle. Where the zipper should have been, however, there was instead a thin and hazy line that shut the bag so completely as to make it seem like one continuous piece.

PROFESSOR GRAY tapped it importantly. "The *kibisis*. The satchel in which you are to place the Gorgon's head after you've cut it off. This is probably the most important single item—except for the boots—that you will be given. You see, according to legend, even after her head has been severed, Medusa still has the power to turn men into stone with a glance. Furthermore, according to Hermes, she is so unlike life as we know it that, merely with her head, she will still be capable of blasting open an ordinary container. This bag can only be opened from the *outside*. You are to place her head in the *kibisis* and keep it there until you hand it over to Hermes. And now for the major item: how are you to get

her head in the first place? Well, we have a sword for you, the famous *harpc*."

He was, Percy noted with disgust, speaking with all the patronizing familiarity of a sports enthusiast or a fight manager explaining the virtues of a new defensive crouch to a young championship contender.

"This is big stuff to you, isn't it, professor? Being able to crowd yourself into a story you used to lecture about?"

"Crowd myself? But I am already in the legend! Professor Gray is as much a part of the original story as Percy S. Yuss is Perseus and Ann Drummond is Andromeda. Hesiod refers to the Graiae Sisters who have been gray since birth and who are largely responsible for the equipping of Perseus on his mission to Medusa. Well, there's only one of me and none of it is female, but it's still close enough to the real myth. As, for example, your rescue of yourself and Ann from the scylla, which is classically a monster of whirlpool and shipwreck, tallies with the original tale which has Perseus saving Andromeda from a sea-beast, though only after he's killed the Gorgon. The fact that you did arrive at Seriphos in a bathtub and as an adult contradicts Pherecydes' version in which the infant Perseus, shut inside a chest with his mother Danae, is rescued from the sea by the fisherman Dictys, brother of King Polydectes. And yet it was Dictys' net that pulled you out of the Mediterranean....

"You see, it goes on and on agreeing with the legend here, altering it slightly there. That's the fascinating thing about myth," the old academician went on: "there's fact in it somewhere, the trick is to find that little nugget of solidity and be able to recognize it when you do. The truth might be that there was originally a

Professor Gray in the actual story as it took place on our world—and his name, sex and...quantity were altered by later writers; or, possibly the truth is that there is a repeating myth in every space-time universe, a myth which has several broad generalizations which must be satisfied, but whose particulars may be filled in from almost any palette."

"You mean," Percy asked slowly, reluctantly unclasping a precious hope he had let nobody know about, "that this time Perseus might be killed by the Gorgon instead of vice versa?"

PROFESSOR GRAY nodded with brain-curdling enthusiasm. "Now you're beginning to understand! Exactly. Don't you see it was always possible, just as it's possible that you aren't the right Perseus any more than I'm the right Gray—or Graiae? That's what makes this whole thing so infernally exciting!"

His pupil started to smile. Unfortunately, since he had great difficulty in lifting the corners of his mouth from under his chin, the attempt was no great success as smiles go. "Yeah," he said. "I'm beginning to see that."

"Here. Try your sword," the professor suggested, his eyes almost popping under the weight of the enormous mass of metal he was holding out to Percy with both straining arms.

Percy took it and, by tearing his back muscles slightly, was able to lay it on the ground before it fell out of his hand.

"Don't tell me I'm supposed to go fence a duel with that girder!"

"Oh, you'll get used to it, you'll get used to it! Notice that it's made of iron, not bronze? Nothing's too good for Perseus!"

"Thanks, pal, from the bottom of my—"

"Of course, in the later vases," the professor had backed into archaeology again, "especially the red-figure ones,

the *harpe* of Perseus is represented in the shape of a sickle. But the earliest kind, the black-figure vases, show it as a straight sword. And a straight sword it must have been because that's how Hermes brought it here to be held against the time when a Perseus arrived."

"Speaking of arrivals," Ann commented from the doorway of the hut, "the 8:45 is coming in on Runway One. Better move back!"

They looked up to see Hermes twirl down from the bright blue sky a little more rapidly than usual. He carried a peculiar and bulky package slung from his belt. He began walking toward them the moment his footsteps punched the soil.

"Is he ready? I hope he's been practicing with those weapons."

"As a matter of fact," the little old man said, rubbing his forehead, "he just began to examine them. You're a little premature, Hermes: remember, these people only arrived last evening."

THE GOLDEN-SKINNED young man nodded absent-mindedly for a moment, then bent to open his package. "I know. Unfortunately, a good deal has changed in the world since then. The Gorgons will be making their final attempt at conquest in the next twenty-four hours. Medusa must be killed before tonight."

"I won't!" Percy raved. "You just can't pull a man out of a nice, comfortable world and expect him to—to—"

"As I recall," Hermes drawled, turning around with a pair of calf-length metallic boots, "I pulled you out of a series of highly unpleasant situations. You were not too comfortable in that underground cell, and you would have been even less so the next day in a certain large cooking vessel

which I destroyed. Then, there was the meeting in the arena...."

"Percy's point," said Professor Gray uncomfortably, "is that he has hardly begun to adjust to the situation, psychologically. And physically—well, he's not even able to flourish the sword as yet."

"I'll take care of those difficulties!" the messenger promised. "Here are your boots. When you rub them together like so, your mobility is multiplied by a factor of twenty. Put them on and take a drink of this."

Dubiously, Percy donned the boots that were to make him twenty times as fast. The soles vibrated underfoot in a way that was not exactly pleasant.

With even more uncertainty, he swallowed some liquid out of a long tubular flask which the golden one held out to him. He almost doubled over as the drink hit his stomach like a bursting rocket. "Whee-ew! That's potent stuff!"

A thin, smirking grin. "Wait! You've yet to find out how potent it really is. Now, I want you to pick up your sword, Percy. And remember as you do how strong you've become. Why, you're such a powerful man that I wouldn't be at all surprised to see you wave it around your head like a tiny twig fallen from a dead tree."

Percy reached for the sword, a rather silly grin on his face. It was all very well for Hermes to try to inspire him with such confidence, but he knew his capacity. A sword as heavy as that...

Only it was very light. It was the easiest thing in the world to lift and flourish. He did so, marveling at the feel of power in his arm and wrist muscles.

"Wonderful!" Professor Gray breathed. "That flask—does it contain the fabled *Nektar*, the ineffable drink of the gods?"

"After a fashion," the messenger said. "After a fashion. Now that we're all set, Perseus, suppose you gather up your armory and we can start out."

EVENTS got very dim after that. Percy found it hard to remember their sequence. Sometime or other, Ann had come up and said a good deal of angry nonsense to Professor Gray who had seemed very confused. Then, just as she was about to throw her arms about his neck, Hermes took him by the hand and they went soaring away. His head felt a lot clearer when they were high against the clouds, racing southward across an island-dotted sea.

"Why," he asked, "don't you people, with all the tremendous stuff you have at your disposal, go after the Gorgon yourself?"

"A matter of prophecy. The legend of Perseus must be fulfilled at all costs." Hermes let the words dribble out of his mouth as he peered ahead anxiously.

Vaguely dissatisfied, Percy found himself wondering if the answer made any sense after all. Like so many of the things he'd been told recently, it sounded as if a small lump of truth had been used to flavor a great steaming bowl of nonsense.

The drink must be making him feel this way, he decided. Professor Gray was an entirely sincere if slightly bumbling human being. Still...

"And why did you tell us that we'd get sent back to our own time? According to what Professor Gray says, that time is dead forever."

The golden man shook his head impatiently and they both almost turned over. "Now, now, this is no time to look for problems and disagreements. You need another drink. Here."

He almost forced the flask to Per-

cy's lips. Again there was an explosion in his intestines which, while not so violent as the first, had much more of an echo. He looked at Hermes with new trust and fondness. How could he ever have doubted so splendid a friend?

"Let me tell you what you will see when you force your way into Medusa's chamber," Hermes was saying with a drowse-provoking smoothness. "Medusa herself will appear to be a horrible, horrible..."

Under them, the waves raced gleefully through each other, pausing every once in a while to shake a fistful of foam at the constantly watching and disapproving sky. Percy swung lazily from the hands of the steadily talking golden man. Life was simple, he thought, when people told you what to do and what to expect. Everything had become so easy.

He looked up as he felt Hermes let go one of his hands and fumble for the switch on his cap of darkness. A moment later, the same hand made a similar gesture on its owner's wide belt.

"Making us invisible, that's what you're doing," Percy commented, nodding his head slowly.

"Are we there already?"

"Yes. Sh-h-h! Please be quiet!"

TURNING his head, he saw a long, greenly rich island expanding up towards them. "Why did you people have to go to so much trouble making this cap for me and all that sort of thing when you could have given me something you already had—like the belt, for example—and I'd have been able to travel here all by myself? What I mean," he went on with large, drunken generosity, "is that you're probably a busy man, Hermes. 'Sa shame for me to drag you away from—"

"Will you shut up?" Hermes' voice

was a whispered custard of fear. His eyes flickered up and down, right and left, as they dropped into an enormous, silent city built from massive blocks of grey, moss-covered stone. "We didn't give you a belt for the same reason we gave you a sword instead of a ray-gun. Short supply."

"Sup—supply?" Percy asked stupidly. He scratched his head and almost knocked the cap off.

"Supply. And besides, do you think we're foolish enough to trust a human with our weapons?" Their feet touched the worn surface of a rock balcony high up on a building. Hermes pulled him behind the great finger of stone that served as one of the lintels for the only doorway. Percy could feel the twitching tenseness in the body of the golden man as he hugged him to the wall and waited to make certain that no one was coming out on the balcony to investigate.

He tried to remember the last thing that Hermes had said. He found he couldn't and wished desperately that the black blobs in his mind would go away and let him think again. But he remembered that Hermes had made some sort of slip in his fright, that abruptly he had almost had the vision of—of—What?

"You need one more drink before you go inside," came the insistent whisper. Percy started to protest that he had been drinking entirely too much of this strange concoction but, as he did so, Hermes thrust the flask into his mouth. He gagged and managed to dribble the bulk of the liquid down his chest, but enough entered his stomach to provide a walloping accompaniment to the clouds which slid over his thoughts once more.

"Now you know what you are to do. Her bedroom is the first one to the right of the corridor leading away from the balcony. Don't even try to think, Perseus: it will only lead to

disaster! All of your instructions are safely buried in your mind; if you just relax and let them take over, you will do exactly the right thing every time. Remember, you can't fail! You cannot fail! Now go!"

Hermes pushed him around the lintel and down the hall. Percy stumbled the first few feet, then managed to walk upright and as stealthily as he knew he should. He wanted to turn back and argue some very important points with his guide, but somehow it was much more important to keep walking, to keep one hand on the hilt of his great sword, to have every nerve anxious and waiting....

The hall was covered with tapestry of a fabric so strange that it almost seemed logical for his eyes to be unable to focus whenever he tried to make out the design. The tapestry ended just before an archway supported by spiral stone columns. He walked in.

ALMOST before he saw the reclining, sleeping figure with the headful of drowsy, slightly restless serpents, he had flipped open the *kibisis* and ground his boots together to close the sub-surface relays. He was speeding toward Medusa at a fantastic rate of speed across an enormous stretch of floor thoroughly as slinky as Hermes had said it would be. And along the walls, his eyes noted—yes, there were chained the groaning, writhing human captives on which the Gorgon race was constantly experimenting. All, all as Hermes had said it would be, droning the picture into his ear as they flew toward ancient Crete above the gaily splashing sea.

He hardly remembered grasping the snakes with one hand and, pulling slightly to extend the neck, lifting the heavy *harpe* behind him. The sword poured down and the chillingly ugly head came free, greasy stinking blood

pouring from it. He dropped it into the *kibisis* with the snapping, sideways motion that Hermes had told him to use, flipped the lid shut and turned to run back, exactly as Hermes had told him he should.

But, in that moment before he closed the *kibisis*, a single, frantic thought had sped out of the severed head. It hit his swirling thoughts like a pebble from a sling-shot and sent them rippling in so many directions that he almost came to a full stop.

Almost. But he ran on, shaken by the awful familiarity of that mental voice. It was as if his mother had tearfully asked him to stop, to stop now, this moment, no matter what the consequences. It was as if the wisest men in the world had assembled in convention and passed a resolution addressed to him, formally requesting Percy Sacrist Yuss in the name of humanity and universal intelligence to turn somehow, before he plunged the whole world into disaster. It was as if a million tiny infants had bawled out in a terrible, unendurable agony that he alone had caused.

The voice was safely shut in the *kibisis*, but its dwindling harmonics rang on and on in his mind.

Hermes came around the lintel as he emerged on the balcony and waited for him to rub his boots back into normal speed. Then he held out a hand. "All right, give it to me."

He started to hand the *kibisis* over, but the memory of the thoughts locked inside made him pause for a moment. He swung the black bag from its long, looping handle undecidedly.

The golden-skinned man laughed. "You're not going to keep it?"

PERCY didn't know what he was going to do. He certainly didn't want that head of surpassing horror for any reason that he could think

of. And, certainly, wasn't he supposed to give the *kibisis* to Hermes as soon as he had filled it with the grisly contents for which it had been designed? Certainly he was. Someone had explained all that to him. But that thought he had received from the head...

"Let's not have any trouble, Percy. Give me the bag and we can start back. Your girlfriend is waiting."

That was decisive. He still couldn't think as clearly as he would have wished, but he could remember. He recognized Hermes' manner now; the bitterness was still too fresh in him for forgetfulness.

It was the manner of the broker who had sold him the half-interest in a more than half-bankrupt restaurant. Just as the point when he'd started to ask the questions that had been bothering him about a series of bookkeeping entries, the man had shoved a fountain pen in his hand and begun to prattle of the possibility of selling the place the very next week at a tidy profit. "Of course I don't know if you'd be interested in getting rid of it so soon after purchase. I imagine if the profit were sufficiently high, however, you would hardly feel like holding on. Well, Mr. Yuss, as soon as we leave my office, I'll have you meet Mr. Woodward. Mr. Woodward has been interested in purchasing this restaurant for some time and, quite confidentially, I think we can get close to..." He had signed almost before he knew he had, and acquired therefrom a piece of property that was more like a cash incinerator than an eating-place.

And he had sworn not to be taken that way again. He recognized Hermes' manner now: it was the con man getting a little impatient at the sucker's delay and throwing out some more bait.

"No," he said. "I won't give it to

you until we return. I think I want Professor Gray to look at it first."

He never knew how he realized that the tiny red tube Hermes suddenly flashed was a weapon. He leaped clumsily sideways and the stone wall section in front of which he had been standing exploded like a burst paper bag. He kicked the boot switch into operation and tore the *harpe* out of its back scabbard.

Hermes was turning the ray-gun around at him with the same un pitying, contemptuous smile he had flashed so many times before, when Percy became a darting, feverish flicker of humanity. As the golden man rolled backwards to find a good shot somewhere in this incredibly fast creature who seemed to be one continuous line, his eyes grew wider and wider, his lips pulled in deeper and deeper; a fear ricocheted through him. And, when the screaming sword finally bit his head off, it rolled to the balcony floor looking just like that—thoroughly popped eyes and almost nonexistent mouth shaming the refined gold of the skin and carefully-cut, artistically-designed features.

Percy leaned on his sword and breathed hard. This was the second in one day! He was becoming a wholesaler!

He turned the boots off. He didn't know when he might need that extra speed again in a hurry, or how much fuel they still had left in them. He stepped carefully away from the bleeding, decapitated corpse.

ABRUPTLY the sword grew very heavy; he holstered it with difficulty. The drug was wearing off. He knew it was a drug now as the hypnosis induced by Hermes began to dissipate. The city was still the same quiet stone. But it was no longer the thing of implicit horror it had been up to a few minutes ago. Men lived

here, he knew, and went about their tasks in their various human ways.

The building on whose balcony he stood was much older than the others around it. It had a distinctive style of architecture—more pillared stone and friezed decoration than even a palace should have.

He tip-toed back along the hall. There was the tapestry he remembered, except that now he could see it quite clearly. Men and women were dancing around a huge upright snake in one section; in another a great lizard plowed a field while people walked behind it joyfully strewing flowers across the new-made furrows. In the last, a tall and beautiful woman stood before a crowd of young children and allowed a pair of small snakes to curl around her bare breasts.

He paused at the entrance to the room, reluctant to enter and confirm his suspicions. In his hands, the black *kibisis* undulated slowly as if the thing inside it were still alive. Well, there at least Hermes had told the truth.

At last he looked into the chamber. It was a large, clean room lit by three huge torches, very sparsely furnished. There were no chained humans along the walls; there were colorful murals instead which dealt with a strange nonhuman race.

There was a kind of triangular altar in the middle of the floor. On the other side of the altar, there was a high dais supporting an intricately carved wooden throne. And sagging in the throne was the headless, blood-covered body of a creature Percy had never seen before.

He brought his hand across his lips as partial understanding came to him. This was a temple. But who—or what—had he killed?

The head inside the bag moved once more. He had to find out! He snapped the *kibisis* open and—

He didn't have to take the head out. Understanding came to him then, complete and rounded, to the best of his capacity to understand—as the still-living and slowly-dying thing in the bag telepathically thrummed out its history. It gave him the information he wanted without reproaches and with complete objectivity. And, as he realized what he had been tricked into doing, he almost fell to his knees.

In the almost nonexistent time it takes to feel a doubt or experience surprise, Percy came to know—

LONG BEFORE Man, there had been the other mammals from which he had derived. And long before mammals, millions of years before, there had been the reptile. The reptile had eaten across the planet as herbivore and carnivore, had raced across it as thundering dinosaur and pigmy, rodent-like lizard. In a span of time beside which the reign of mammals was as a moment, the reptile had ruled the Earth with an absolute despotism in all the forms—and many more besides—that his warm-blooded successor was to achieve.

Inevitably, one of these forms laid its accent on intelligence.

A creature arose which called itself Gorgon and walked its ways with pride. Great cities the Gorgons built; they captured and tamed the unintelligent dinosaurs and made cattle out of them, even to the ground-shaking Brontosaurus. Those they could not tame, they destroyed for sport, much as a thoughtful simian newly arrived from the trees was to do much later. And, partly for sport, partly for burning conviction, they destroyed themselves.

War after war, super-weapon after super-weapon, they fought and lived through. They even destroyed the continent on which they had originated, the home of most of their science and art and all of their major industry—

they saw it sink into a boiling sea, and they lived through that. Then, at last, they gathered in their shrunken numbers upon inhospitable shores and created a way of life that made war between them impossible.

There was a brief season of great cooperative achievement, an instant or two of Indian Summer, before the curtain began to fall upon the Gorgons once more. Their seed had been injured by one of the latest weapons: they were no longer breeding true. In small quantities at first, the number of monsters and defectives being born increased rapidly. Almost the entire energy of the race was channeled into a frenzied biological research.

They cured every disease that had ever made them the slightest bit uncomfortable, they doubled and quadrupled their life-span again and again, they came to such ultimately complete understanding of their bodies and minds that they were well-nigh god-like and just this side of immortality. But still, every generation, there were fewer of them....

EVENTUALLY they made peace with their approaching racial death, and set themselves to cheat it by passing their knowledge and achievements on to another creature. This was not easy to find. First, they tended to look within the ranks of the reptiles for a successor, but they had depleted the vital energies of the best nonintelligent species as badly as they had their own. They had a brief success with the serpents and pythons but, despite increased intelligence, no amount of selective breeding or indoctrination could persuade these creatures to live communally. Second, they tried the amphibians; then the birds—

After many trials and many errors, the Gorgons settled at last on the mammalian primate. Here, however, with much difficulty and heartache

because of the creature's fundamentally alien orientation, they achieved success. Slowly, over the unhurried centuries, the Gorgon selected this stock, discarded that one, gently stimulated and educated, until a civilization of sorts had been achieved. A little longer and they could throw aside the mantle of godhood and teach their charges directly.

But the Olympians came.

It was true, as Hermes had told Professor Gray, that a weakness in the sub-spatial fabric between universes had made it possible for them to enter. He had neglected to mention that they were the first and only ones to invade this universe, they and the assorted monsters, that a completely different *corpus* of natural law made it possible.

Originally, they poured into Earth from almost every spot on her surface. They conquered and enslaved, killed and looted, but their chief object was land. The available space on their own highly crowded world was very limited.

And there were only a handful of Gorgons to defend mankind against them. Hurriedly, these ancient reptiles turned to their forgotten and hoary armories, brought out the weapons they had sworn never to use and plunged into combat to save, not themselves—for this they were now psychologically incapable of doing through warfare—but the infant race they guarded. And slowly over the years—while liquid fire rained upon one land and floods swept through another—the invaders were driven back and the exits sealed one by one.

The Gorgon losses had been small numerically, but devastating in proportion to their total strength. There were only three females who escaped being mortally wounded; two badly crippled males had hung on for a century before dying without viable

offspring. The three remaining intelligent reptiles saw no alternative but to concentrate in the Eastern Mediterranean and provide at least a section of the human race with an accelerated course of instruction.

THEN, FIVE hundred years ago, the outsiders were heard from again. This was a remnant which, cut off on this planet by the Gorgon victory, had returned to the sealed-off Mount Olympus exit and secretly rebuilt its strength. They had attacked one awful night and wiped out Cnossus, the capital city. Wearily, the Gorgons turned back to combat. They drove the Olympians off and crushed them for the time, but were no longer strong enough themselves to wipe out completely the golden-skinned race. A degenerate fragment remained which was now, like humanity's protectors, a constantly dwindling species.

Before this had been achieved, however, every large city in Crete had been gutted and Sthenno and Euryale, Medusa's sisters, had been killed. She worked desperately now at her double task: to pass on as much of the Gorgon knowledge as humanity was capable of absorbing and to rebuild enough of the ancient weapons to prevent the one remaining danger—an Olympian attempt to break through the sub-spatial fabric once more and regain contact with their parent universe.

To this end she had been preparing a multitude of weapons which men of this time, under her direction, could use against the Olympians. Unfortunately, the entire orientation of the Gorgon educational process had been opposed to war and weapons. This generation of Cretans, while superior in brains and breeding to most twentieth century humans, were decidedly not warriors and were having

great difficulty developing the martial spirit.

Medusa had been sending the priestesses through whom she governed to nearby lands in search of a people who, while possessing the requisite belligerence, were sufficiently advanced intellectually so they still could be persuaded of the necessity of joining the last campaign against the Olympians. The concept of forcing people to fight—even for themselves—was anathema to a Gorgon.

But she had been anticipated. The Olympians had evidently managed to receive some sort of message from their own world and believed that, by operating on both sides of the subspatial barrier, they could effect another breakthrough. It was probably one of the last attempts that could be made (possibly the civilization in the other universe was beginning to dissolve under the continual corrosion of war as the Gorgons' had), and they considered it essential to remove the last of the ancient reptiles to insure that they would not be interrupted.

Knowing that they were far too weak and backward now to carry off a frontal attack with any success, they must have developed the idea of using Percy as a catspaw. Probably, the head mused, one of their number—scouting among ordinary people for crumbs of information Medusa might have dropped—happened upon a superstitious myth-prophecy and decided to develop it into fact. The arrival of a young man from a previous space-time universe worked in perfectly, since no human of this period could be persuaded or frightened into attacking a Gorgon.

AND, AT THE reason why a human assassin was needed by the Olympians, Percy's knees almost buckled.

For no Gorgon, my son, is capable of injuring a human being without committing immediate mental suicide. It would have been like a mother stabbing her crawling infant for me to have killed you, as I could have, when your harpe sang at my throat.

"Listen," he said desperately to the tired, dying head in the black bag, "you may not want to force people to fight for their world, but I don't have any such compunctions. I've certainly been forced to do enough things in my own life that I most definitely didn't like! Now, I know a place where there's a bunch of plenty belligerent characters—and I know a way of getting them to volunteer for the forward echelons. I want to do what I can to fix up this terrible thing I did!"

Medusa considered. He could feel her holding on to her vital energies with more and more difficulty, despite the enormous psychosomatic control practiced by the Gorgons. Her life was seeping away.

Yes, the faint thought came at last. Yes, it might save the planet. It must be tried. Call Athena, young man. Call her with your voice.

He hesitated for just a moment. He licked his lips. It would be kind of nasty if this was just another trap. "Athena!" he called.

Almost immediately, an old priestess hobbled down the hall to the balcony. She clapped her hands to her ears and her mouth distended in horror at what she saw, but at a rapidly telepathed order from Medusa, she controlled the scream in time.

This is no time for sorrow or anger. Weeping must come later in its proper time and place. Meanwhile, the Olympians prepare to tear down once more the barrier between the worlds. If they succeed, there will be none of my race to stand between them and you. They must be stopped! All else

must be subordinated to that necessity. So, go, call your sisters together and make ready the things I have prepared for this day. And hurry, Athena, hurry!

An efficient nod and the old woman had gone back down the hall calling her subordinates.

What are you going to do? the thought came.

Percy told her. There was a pause. Then, *Let it be done, then. But remember my son, no matter what the circumstances may be. I cannot injure a human being!*

Athena returned with a dozen or so wide-eyed, frightened young priestesses whom she organized and ordered so efficiently that they had no time to do more than bite their lips occasionally at the thought of what the *kibisis* contained. Even so, they made Percy feel terrible. He had killed not merely their deity, but their wise teacher and gentle friend. And why? Because he was a sucker.

WELL, HE was through with that from now on, he vowed. He knew what the score was—and from here on out, he would be acting on what he knew rather than on what others told him.

Each priestess was standing on a wide metallic rug piled high with shimmering weapons that looked like spears and battle-axes, but that he knew must be disguised as such merely to be credible to the people of the period. Athena beckoned and he stepped onto her rug. She pulled a tiny switch set in a corner box and turned a small wheel. The rug rose and soared from the huge balcony with no feeling of motion.

"The island of Seriphos," he said to Athena in reply to her questioning glance. Behind him, he could see the other priestesses each on her flying

metal carpet strung out across the sky.

They flew over the waves at a much greater speed than he had when traveling with Hermes. This was a tremendous science he had killed, Percy thought wistfully. All these millennia of working and nurturing and along comes a stumblebum name Percy Sac-trist Yuss who has listened to a good smart line and—

Had it happened the same way in his own previous space-time universe, he wondered? Well, there was no way of knowing. Right now he was operating completely outside the framework of the legend—at least Professor Gray had told it to him. Anything could happen.

They came down directly in the village square, as Percy had intended they should for maximum effect. And, while the townsfolk stood around with mouths hanging as slack as their hands, he strode toward the palace with Athena hurrying along on his right.

"I wonder," he said, out of the corners of his mouth to the black bag. "This *harpe's* getting heavier. I can't walk with as much dignity as I'd like to. Could you try some of that hypnosis stuff, perhaps..."

He strode into the pillared hall with clanking boots. He stopped against the massive column where he had been placed upon being brought to this hall as a prisoner. King Polydectes was having lunch. He rose from the long, crude wooden table at Percy's entrance and started to wipe his lips with a nearby wife's hair.

"Welcome home, Perseus, welcome home!" he said with a creaking, somewhat laborious enthusiasm. "We've been waiting for you to return!"

"Have you now?"

"Oh, certainly my boy, certainly! Ever since that tragic mistake out at the theater, we've known for certain

you were really Perseus. I've punished that zoo-keeper horribly, I assure you! Why, he was supposed to have a hundred dancing flower-decked maidens greet you and the girl. Somehow or other he got confused and rang in that scylla. I have absolutely no idea how he made such—"

"Can it. I'm here on business. Call everybody in who can get here fast."

POLYDECTES nodded vehemently and waved at Dictys with both hands. As his brother obediently sped out of the hall, the king, his eyes fastened warily on the black bag that swung at Percy's side, asked in what he evidently considered was a winning voice: "Aren't you going to say hello to your mother?"

Percy stepped back. "My—my mother?"

"Yes, she arrived this morning. When she told us her name, we realized how completely the legend had been fulfilled. We've been making her as happy as possible since, even though it has been a little—eh, a little—expensive."

He pointed to a spot halfway down the table. Percy gasped, then let it roll out into unbelieving laughter. Mrs. Danner sat in her dirty flowered housedress, her arms bent around a huge wine-skin.

"Poor little Marybelle Danner," she was mourning between slobbers. "It's all weak stuff, the best they got's like a baby's slap. And they mix it with water yet!"

So even this much of the myth was fulfilled too! Not a Danae but a Danner had arrived to be associated with him. And the fact that she wasn't really his mother? "'She's somebody's mother, boys,' he said."

Obviously, if someone was needed to round out the generalities of a legend, they too "fell through", parchment or no parchment. Although he'd like

very much to question Mrs. Danner on the exact mechanics of her arrival. It might be important and useful....

"Take good care of her," he ordered. "And Dictys!"

"Yes, sir," the king's brother inquired as he reentered the hall with a substantial and highly uneasy section of the population behind him. He too kept throwing anxious glances at the *kibisis*: everyone seemed very well educated in the legend on this point. "Anything I can do for you? Anything at all? Just name it, that's all I ask, just—"

"Somewhere on the southern tip of the island," Percy told him, "you'll find an old man, together with the girl who escaped from the arena with me. I want you to find them and make them as comfortable as you can. Concentrate on nothing but making life pleasant for them until I return. If you get slack anywhere along the line, you'll hear from me. Understand?"

"I'm on my way," Dictys assured him. "Hey, Menon, Bupalus, Pataikion! This way. We've to run. Favor for a hero, a man we all admire!"

Percy grinned as the three violently nodding men followed Dictys out of the hall. It was fun to unsucker. But he had business, important business, as the sight of the grim priestess at his back reminded him.

"Polydectes," he said, "you are about to start the first draft in the military history of Seriphos. I'm on my way to attack the Olympians and I'd like you to furnish about fifty good fighting men to assist me in the project."

THE KING stilled the crowd and turned nervously back to the young man before him. "Uh...my people like to stay out of other fracas. That's why they call me—"

"I know," Percy told him. "I know. Only this is urgent. I want those fifty

men very badly indeed. We'll give them powerful weapons such as they've never dreamed of before—and teach them their use. But this is your chance to cut down on that surplus population you're always talking about. And, as I said, it's very important to me." He patted the *kibisis* delicately as he spoke.

"Oh, in that case," said King Polydectes. "If it's urgent! Why, certainly. Captain of the Guard! Detail all twenty-eight members of the army, the ten policemen and any twelve members of the Citizens' Reserve for duty with this famous and spectacular hero. If any one grumbles, tell him he can choose between that and being cooked over a slow fire."

"I see you've repaired the execution pot," Percy commented.

The king shook his head unhappily. "No, it was a dead loss. And we can't get any kind of decent replacement anywhere. But we've been experimenting with barbecue recently. The results, while not perfect as yet, show a good deal of promise. I'm very hopeful."

Percy walked outside to watch the fifty men being assembled. The priestesses had broken them into very small groups and were explaining the functions of the strange new weapons to them. The men looked half-dazed and half-resentful; the fact that women were teaching them how to fight seemed especially confusing. But the presence of "the hero", and the young women's business-like approach successfully kept their attention from wandering.

The head of Medusa stirred in the open *kibisis*. *Hurry, my son. The time of my last weakness draws near.*

"One last thing," Percy assured her. He turned back to the palace entrance where Polydectes stood munching on the dripping leg of a sheep and watching the whole scene with friendly in-

terest. I've done my part, his attitude suggested. I've given of the flower of my country. The best I have. No sacrifice can be too great....

He stared from the king to the weeping women bidding their husbands and sons goodbye, the nervous male conscripts trying to understand their instructors and obviously wondering how they had gotten into a war with Olympians, and back to the chewing monarch.

"There's one thing you haven't been told," he announced. "King Polydectes has volunteered to lead his troops into combat. King Polydectes isn't afraid of the Olympians, so long as he has our weapons to use against them. King Polydectes says, 'Damn the thunderbolts, full speed ahead!'"

"I d-do?" The chunk of mutton dropped to the ground, the sound of its fall obscured by the cheer that went up.

"You most certainly do," Percy told him. He grabbed the quivering monarch with one hand and, stroking the back bag suggestively with the other, drew him gently on to the metallic rug which Athena operated. The other priestesses followed suit with their charges. "This is why," he said in a voice that echoed back and forth across the square, "they call you Brave King Polydectes!"

THEY TOOK off to the accompaniment of another wild y rattling cheer.

Once they were scudding along the curve of the Greek mainland, Athena began explaining one of the weapons to the ruler of Seriphos.

"You sight your target in the holes running lengthwise through these spears—like this. See that rock? Then, as soon as you've made your sight, you press this little button in the rear. After that, all you have to do is let go of the spear. It won't miss."

"I'm an old man," Polydectes muttered. "Toothless, worn and feeble. In the bleak winter of my life, all I want to do is lie by the fire and watch the youths frolic and fight. Ah, youth, youth!"

Percy walloped his back heartily. "Well, we're giving you a new lease on life! You might as well pay attention, because when we come down, we'll come down fighting. And there's no turning back!"

They passed two great peaks near the coast. "Mount Pelion," Athena said, nodding at the first. "And that's Mount Ossa. Olympus is next."

My son, came the hurried thought. I am dying fast. Grasp my head by the long hairy spines on its back and hold it in front of you when you attack. And, if you are about to be overcome, throw it at your enemies. But you must move rapidly! Already can I sense the dissolution of the impermanent interspace that keeps one world from disturbing another. Our enemies will pour through and overwhelm the pitiful striving. Remember your strength! Remember that it is greater now than when the false Olympian led you to the balcony of my temple in New Cnossus. Feel it, my son, feel it leap through you; feel your mightiness!

And, as they neared the majestic mountain and swung into a circle of carpets for the attack, Percy felt the strength boil in his muscles. He wouldn't have any trouble wielding the *harpe* now!

The only trouble with that was that all of his weapons had been given to him by the Olympians. Wouldn't they know how to deal with them?

He seized a spear as a horde of golden-skinned men swirled off the side of the mountain and rose to meet them. Sighting somewhere in the center of the group, he pressed the button. The spear buzzed out of his hand

and plunged downward, splitting three Olympians like so much *shish kebab*.

Beside him, he heard a similar noise as Polydectes let a weapon go too. The king's success was even greater—he got four flying outsiders. Now that they were in combat, Polydectes was concentrating on nothing but the kill, the most efficient kill, as befitted a barbarian monarch.

A SHEET of flame flashed down from one of the carpets as someone brought another weapon into play. An entire group of ascending Olympians vanished. They turned and sought shelter in the mountain again.

Now, they had the advantage. The long, purple cone of a ray gun raked across a carpet and exploded it. Then another shattered outward. The priestesses brought their craft up higher, out of the ray gun's obvious range.

"Won't work," Polydectes told Percy crisply, as if he'd been advising him on military strategy for the past five campaigns. "They'll come up one at a time now and burn us down. Whatever this thing is that we're flying, we've got to go in after them!"

Percy nodded. He gestured to Athena who, making an overhead motion to the other priestesses, spun the little wheel rapidly. They swooped down, the fore-part of a long parabola of carpets.

Take me now, my son, came the urgent summons. Now!

Percy grabbed the lizard-like head out of the bag by a lock of something on the back that was very much like green hair and held it out in front of him. He reached around and whipped out the *harpe*.

The purple rays died out. He heard screams of terror from below. "A Gorgon, a Gorgon!"

"Yes," he said grimly. "What's left of the one you fellows talked me into killing. It's coming back to roost

along with the sucker that did the job!"

They touched the ground and he leaped down, clicking his boot switches into action. With this much extra speed, he'd match a sword against a ray gun any old time!

Except that from the mouth of the immense cave halfway up the mountain a dozen golden-skinned men poured out wearing identical boots and blasting purple cones ahead of them! And they moved so much faster than he did, their boots were either better-fueled or better-made.

Polydectes behind him accounted for one of them. And a sheet of flame flapping down from one of the nearest descending carpets burned half of the rest out of existence. He ran on toward the cave desperately trying to dodge and circle around the burst-provoking rays.

ONE OF THE Olympians angled in front of him. Percy cursed, realizing he would never be able to reach him in time to use the *harpe*. The fellow's ray gun came up.

And Medusa struck.

Percy, catching her agony in his mind, realized what the effort had cost her. But the Olympian fell forward in cracking fragments; he had been completely ossified on the spot!

So another aspect of the legend was true! Medusa could—

He was inside the cave now and had no time to think. In front of him there was a rank of determined and armed Olympians, some sixty or seventy deep. And beyond them, over their heads, his eyes rapidly followed intricate whirls of wiring and shimmering instruments to where—at the rear of the cave—a little whirlpool of red energy was growing larger in the rocky ceiling.

They were breaking through! At this very moment, they were acquir-

ing reinforcements from the dread other side!

Feverishly, he poured into the attack, slashing them from before him like so many scallion heads on the restaurant cutting board. Beside him, he could hear Polydectes roaring and the men of Seriphos as they poured up.

But he couldn't make it! He'd have to climb those Olympian-filled steps. He knew it despairingly as he hacked and dodged, slew and was ripped himself. He saw that the little whirlpool had grown larger now, that a huge machine had taken shape on the other side and was coming through.

Throw me, Percy! The Gorgon abruptly screamed in his mind.

He brought his arm back and threw the head straight at the skimming scarlet circle high overhead. There was a moment of last instruction that thrummed inside his brain, then the shrill agony of dissolution as the head touched the red energy whirlpool and exploded.

The Olympians screamed their despair when the dust had blown aside sufficiently to show that the entrance was gone. It had been sealed again forever, Percy knew. Never again would they be able to pool their bits of half-knowledge and rebuild their side.

The men of Seriphos pressed in for the completion of the kill. A few Olympians managed to escape out of the cage mouth and soar away, but those who remained fought listlessly.

What were those last instructions the Gorgon had shot at his mind? *The poem! The poem!*

Which poem? The one beginning: "*And thence came the son of Danae, flaming with courage and spirit—*"?

HE WAS standing on a sunny hilltop in the northern part of a small island. There was no one near him.

Percy looked around stupidly. What—

Then, as his mind settled slowly and he remembered the advice Medusa had frantically telepathed to him, he understood. He wasn't happy, but he understood.

Now that the Perseus sequence was over in that particular space-time universe, it was possible only to arrive at the beginning of the one in the next. And while the parchment was gone, the poem related to him, to Percy-Perseus. With that subjective aura and the psychological impetus the Gorgon had given him, he had only to remember the lines of the poem to be precipitated into the next universe.

Why? So that this time there would be no mistake. So that this time he would not be talked into slaying the last surviving Gorgon and removing from humanity the fountain of ancient peaceful wisdom which could nourish it. So that this time he would not—at long, long last—be a sucker.

He regretted it. He especially regretted the loss of Ann whom he had hardly come to know.

But, come to think of it, wouldn't

there be another Ann Drummond in this universe? Yes, and couldn't he be even more successful? He knew his way around now. He'd do that little job for the Gorgon, all right, but first Percy—or Perseus as he might as well call himself here—was going to strut a little. He was carrying a small armory, he knew his power—and he wasn't taking any con games from any man.

No, this time Seriphos was going to hear from him right at the start.

He started down the hill-side, not noticing the young man paddling furiously in a just-materialized bathtub out in the bay.

Nor did he notice the squad of King Polydectes' soldiers eating their uninteresting meal in a clump of bushes halfway down the hill. Nor, if he had seen them, would he have known that their commander was the type to have annoying strangers knocked out from behind so their fine clothes could be stolen at leisure.

Especially was their commander that type after a hot, irritating day spent fruitlessly chasing *harpies* in the hills by order of King Polydectes....

THE END



The Lazy Way

By L. A. Burt

IT ISN'T enough that television has come into the home and made it possible for people to be entertained without doing anything more than flipping a switch. Nowadays, many people take their pleasure only in vicarious ways. The immediate future will carry this even farther. Apparently the latest victim to fall to this inherent love of laziness is the ancient and noble art of reading. Already struck a body blow by television, reading will really shiver under this newcomer—talking books!

Now, books recorded on phonograph records are not new. They have been used for the blind for many years and naturally serve a very useful purpose. The latest

proposal of a manufacturer, however, goes so far as to extend them to the average home. This is dependent upon the development of a new slow-playing record running at as few as sixteen revolutions per minute! This is about an hour to a side of a twelve-inch record!

The manufacturer frankly is catering to the laziness of people, gambling on their willingness to enjoy reading vicariously. The potential market is huge, of course, and we may see practically everything recorded. Sociologists and scientists will have a field day with this phenomenon. Just how much of a sensory organ can you become? At the rate we're going we'll turn into simply a vast eye and ear with a tiny finger for turning on switches!



Grotesque and weird, he rose out of the stormy sea and into our lives

A HANDFUL OF DUST

By Ivar Jorgensen

All people are born of woman.

**But the sea gave birth to this
man—and then disowned his body**

I AM SURE there are things under the sea we know nothing about. Not just the grotesque marine growths nosing cold and blind along the ocean floor. But stranger and far more horrible things: mad nightmare tricks of evolution that would make our senses reel were they but known.

Long ago I saw something of this—when I was a child on our island in the chill Atlantic. My father was a stern, craggy-eyed man who loved the sea and all things about it. But a kind and able man. He built our house with his own hands before Donny and I were born. He put it in a place where the sea beat screaming and boastful against a rock wall on one side, and was a gentle sand beach siren on the other.

With the house finished, my father turned to the gentle blue-eyed girl who was to be my mother and said, "Now we must have our children."

But all this was before the Night. I was seven, then, and Donny, my brother, had blown out eleven candles on his birthday cake. It was a blustery night with cloud banks scudding across the moon, turning the world alternately light and dark and bringing always the promise of rain. There was happiness and laughter in our house. Well do I remember this because, after we opened the door that night, happiness and laughter were gone for a long long time.

The knock upon our door was a heavy, sullen thud; again and again, in slow lumbering rhythm that made one think of ponderous, unhurried entities.

My father opened the door.

A man stood on the threshold; a man, as we all truly and sincerely believed. Thin spindling legs dripped water and bits of seaweed on the stone. His hips were hardly wider than his knee-span, but at the waist he began to broaden until his shoulders reached the width of the door frame. His arms hung loose, swinging in a slight, even rhythm. His black hair was washed tight down to his head as by rising suddenly out of water. Pasty white was the face with eyes, nose and mouth where they belonged but—but something about them—something wrong, like pieces not put correctly together; like a hastily fashioned mask over things better unseen.

And he was completely naked.

The shock of this apparition appearing at our door turned us all to statues. Even my father, whose courage and resourcefulness had built us a home on the lip of ever-present disaster, could not move or speak.

Only my mother moved. Her arm went out undirected, and Donny and

I moved into the protecting circle of that arm.

THE MAN moved stolidly into the house and stood with his arms swinging in the odd rhythm. He spoke. The words were unintelligible. As I remember them, they were, "Gar-gara-loop-gar", spoken from deep in the chest and almost without lip movement.

My father vanquished his surprise and closed the door. "Good heavens, man! You're in bad shape." He laid a hand on the naked creature's shoulder. "Martha! Quickly! A blanket! He's freezing to death."

I remember clearly that my impression was the opposite. The man did not appear to me to be in the least uncomfortable, nor in the least embarrassed at his nakedness.

My mother arose and fled from the room. She returned shortly with a green wool blanket. She handed it to my father rather than to the visitor, and my father threw it over the man's shoulders and drew it around close in front of him.

The man looked down at the blanket with that deliberation which was to become his hallmark. His eyes came slowly away from my mother's face; slowly, very slowly, with no change whatever in his expression, he lowered his head, then his eyes, until they were focused on the edges of the blanket down his front.

My father said, "There, there, old chap. Everything's all right now. What happened? Are there others?" He thought of the natural thing: a boat wrecked on the rocks, bodies beaten to a pulp by the pounding waves. Disaster.

Quite briskly, he gripped the edges of the blanket together and even guided the man's hands toward holding them. "Sit here, old fellow. Sit down and rest yourself. Martha,

food and a hot drink. He needs something hot quickly."

Again it was in my mind that the man didn't need anything. Such are the preceptions of childhood. To me he looked to be in no distress whatever; nor in any emotional upset. From my observations, any shortcomings in the creature would have been covered by one term—uncomprehension. And that, the uncomprehension of some lower order. A dog, a cow, a goat. Not knowing. Not caring.

MY FATHER urged him toward a chair. The man turned his head very slowly until his eyes were focused upon my father, then allowed himself to be placed in a chair at the table.

"You didn't tell me if there were others," my father repeated gently. "Tell me where your boat is and I'll go out and do what I can."

Again that maddeningly slow raising of the head; the creeping movement of the eyes upward; the slow focusing. Again he spoke: "Nosh-noshamoo-nosh."

I looked at Donny and found him looking also at me. This was certainly food for merriment. Suppressed giggles were in order. But the laughter was not forthcoming. Was it damned up by pity or fear? I have often wondered since.

My father was entirely confused. He stood looking down at the man, charged deeply with uncertainty.

"Your friends should have help," he said. "If you'll only tell me."

My mother had gone into the kitchen. Now she returned bearing a tray. There was bread already buttered, a plate of cold fried perch, a cup of steaming coffee. She set the tray on the table before our visitor and then stepped back, her eyes troubled.

The man had focused slowly upon

her and as she backed away his gaze held, cold, flat, empty; a dead, steady watching as from motionless eyes carved into a granite cliff.

"Your food, man! Your food," my father said, and I sensed an uneasiness in his voice; an uneasiness that came from not understanding.

The same snail-like reaction; the head turning and lowering. Father said, "Martha—I'll have to go and look. This man seems to have cracked up. There must be others."

I ran and brought his wind jacket and cap. He left the house and I saw my mother's eyes following him in sudden and silent entreaty. She clasped her hands together. Then, as the door closed, her arm went out and both Donny and I were in its circle.

The man was staring in rapt fascination at the steaming cup of coffee before him. Now there was expression in his badly-put-together face; a new alertness that had depth rather than movement. His hand came up and moved out with that same spine-tickling deliberation. The hand opened and engulfed the coffee cup.

Reaction was swift. His mouth snapped open and stretched his lips wider at one side than the other in a manner remindful of an epileptic under attack. From the revealed maw there came sound even more inarticulate than before. But more eloquent. A "Ga-a-a-w-w-w", full of rage, hatred and pain.

THE HAND moved quickly enough this time, but only to clear the danger zone—to get away from the scalding fluid. Then it was as though a brake had been thrown on and the former snail-pace was resumed.

His face straightened out slowly while he stared at the coffee cup, raised his hand and licked it with a long pale tongue. Close against me I felt my mother shiver and her arm

tightened around us.

The man extended a finger and poked the pieces of fish. He favored us with a look—baleful, it seemed to me—then poked a finger through the buttered bread. He licked the finger and sat for an age, apparently deciding whether or not he liked it. He did. He picked up the slice and pushed it into his mouth.

While he chewed the bread his eyes began swinging in an arc around the room. They traveled until they focused upon my mother.

And again there was a faint semblance of expression. It was as though the man was seeing her for the first time; as though he lived without benefit of memory and any experience, no matter how many times repeated, was ever new.

We stood thus when my father returned. There was preoccupation in his deep frown. He signalled nothing to my mother by a shrug of his shoulders, then said, "There is no craft in sight—no wreckage on the beach. If a boat went down, the sinking was swift and terrible."

The man seated at the table continued to stare at my mother. Father stepped close and laid a hand on his shoulder. The strange head—with hair still shining and cap-like, stuck to the skull—came around until the eyes focused on my father's hand.

"You'll need rest, old man," my father said, but now his voice had lost something—and gained something. Lost its original and natural quality of pity. Gained an uncertainty—almost a muted fear as he drew his hand back and unconsciously wiped it on his pants-leg.

"You have a room ready, Martha?"

My mother nodded and my father assumed a false heartiness. "Fine! Excellent. Come along, old chap, and we'll get you between blankets."

THE MAN came slowly to his feet.

He seemed supine, negative, entirely willing to be led away. But as he came to the stairway leading aloft, he stopped and turned and walked back to the table. His flat fish-eyes were on the coffee cup. He reached out with great deliberation. His fingers settled over the cup. He crushed it with an inward, squeezing motion, and the cup became shards of broken pottery, the coffee spilling out over the table. The man snarled—a soft, contented snarl, then turned and was ready to go aloft.

Donny and I waited downstairs and it is notable that nothing was said—no words spoken between us. Father came downstairs, my mother close behind him. His eyes were cloudy with thought and all the happiness and merriment was gone from our house.

Mother cleaned up the smashed coffee cup and we all sat down around the table. My mother spoke: "We asked him nothing about himself. We do not know his name nor where he comes from."

Deep silence was her answer but she pressed on: "Doesn't it seem strange that we asked him nothing about himself?"

Father replied finally: "Perhaps it is best that some things are not known. Come. Bed awaits us."

Donny and I slept together in a room at the far end of the hall. We were tucked in and kissed—a certain preoccupation in the kisses of this night—and we were alone. We lay silent for a long time; a long time until Donny said, "I dare you."

This I had been waiting for but with the hope that Donny would not speak. I was afraid, but a dare—what could one do?

"I'm not afraid. I double dare you."

We climbed out of bed, opened our door softly. All was silent—night silence. We knew where he would be: in

the room to the left of the stairs where all guests of the island slept.

We crept forward, seeking and finding each other's hands in the darkness. We approached the door and I grasped the knob and turned it—opened the door slowly, tensed for creaking hinges. The hinges did not creak.

HE WAS lying on the bed, naked and uncovered, the blankets having been pushed to the floor. He lay upon his back, in exact geometrical alignment with the rectangle of the bed frame. His feet were pressed together, his hands folded—upon his breast. The eyes were closed and he looked for all the world like an obscene entity laid out in Christian reverence for the last time.

The moonlight came in the window to lay a span of white ghostliness across him like a slim, pale banner. I shivered and felt Donny's hand tighten on mine. We closed the door and tiptoed back to our room.

"He's a funny man," Donny whispered. "A very funny man." Then he was asleep. I awoke several times during the night to hear my father's quick, firm footstep in the hall.

The following day was highlighted by two incidents which remain in my memory. The man, dressed in a pair of my father's dungarees and a faded blue shirt, was sitting in the parlor staring stolidly into space. My father regarded him from the doorway for a long interval, then came briskly forward. He forced a smile and spoke heartily: "Now I say, old man—"

My father had a fresh pipe between his teeth and had just scratched a match as he stepped forward. The match flamed brightly—

The epileptic twist of the man's features. Bared teeth. A cringing and yet not a cringing—rather it was a coiling of power deep in the pale, grotesque-

looking body.

My father stopped as though he'd walked into a stone wall. I saw my father's face as it drained of color, as his hand shook and the match fell to the floor. The man's eyes followed it and my father took a quick step backwards. I could sense the sickness inside of him. Terror? Loathing? Quivering disgust?

I never found out. But knowing my father—his wisdom and courage—and gaining some wisdom myself in later years, I know now that my father saw something in the man that was beyond description. Some lurking unplumbed horror deep in the brain-entrails of our visitor that drove him a step backward, away from its awful stench. Something the learned books of our ages do not contain. Some secret beyond the words we have to reveal secrets.

Father went into the kitchen and we followed. My mother saw his white and straining face. "We must have help," he said. "I will signal."

Mother nodded and my father retired to the tower he had built upon our house to make use of the white flags—our only means of communication with the shore.

He returned to the kitchen to say, "The waters are high. No boat can come now."

This frightened my mother more than she was willing to reveal. "How soon?"

"Three days I would say. Maybe sooner."

Mother went quickly about her work so her face could be turned away.

THE SECOND episode occurred late in the afternoon. The man had left the house to wander about the island. All morning he'd stared at my mother until she was quivering from

flaming and terrorized nerves. Then he had walked out the door.

How he got back into the house without being seen I do not know. Donny and I were in the living room mending the wheels of a broken train when we discovered his presence. A sudden cry from aloft. My mother's cry. A moaning from her lips just before she came running down the stairs.

I saw her face and knew the definition of terror.

She ran on into the kitchen and we followed. She stood clinging to the edge of the table, her throat working in agony.

Then we heard the slow, doomful tread of heavy footsteps on the stairs.

He was coming down.

"In God's name!" my mother whispered. "In God's name!" and this was a prayer, but I don't know whether it kept the man from entering the kitchen or not. He stopped in the living room and when I peeked a few moments later he was seated in a chair staring at the wall.

"Don't tell your father. Don't say a word about this. Help is coming. Everything will be all right."

We honored our mother's request, which was not a difficult thing to do because there was little we could have told father. There was so little we knew with our children's minds.

But children can know terror.

My father killed the man that night.

It was after a tense and fear-fraught time while the evening meal was eaten and the sun pitched down behind angry seas on the far bow of the horizon. Of the killing I can tell little as there is very little I know.

Mother was aloft and we, busy with our games, had lost track of the man. The signal for tragedy was the slamming of the outer door by my father. As it echoed there came a scream of stark terror from aloft. My mother's

voice, shrill and primordial as the scream of the defenseless woman in the dim dawn of time.

My father leaped through the living room; his feet did not seem—to our startled eyes—to touch the floor. Only his hand touched the wall, to come away gripping the rifle that sat on wooden pegs driven into the beams.

DONNY and I waited unable to move. Again the scream came and under it, as though supporting it in a duet of macabre music, came slaving gutturals: "Glag-glagamoo-glag."

Then the roar of the rifle. A thudding weight on the floor aloft. The weeping of a woman.

We climbed the stairs, Donny and I, when our courage was sufficiently girded. We saw our mother on the bed. Father was kneeling beside her, stroking her hair.

On the floor in the hall lay the man, again naked, and now with a gaping chest from which oozed a blackness I knew—in later years—was not blood.

A semblance of cold normalcy was restored—deliberately forced by our parents who had the responsibility of children in their house. But our questions were greeted by silence and soon we stopped asking.

We were allowed up far later than usual that night, staying close to the warm glow of the lamplight which seemed to throw out a protective encirclement against the grisly silence and darkness of the stairwell leading aloft.

And came the moment when my father arose from his chair, took one of the lamps, and ascended the stairs. We waited and after a long time he came down. He stood holding the lamp high, and in his face we could see him as we had known him before; the pallor gone; the fear blown from his eyes; the heavy pipe held serene be-

tween his teeth.

"I think you should all see," he said. "I think you should come up with me."

Donny and I were eager for the chill adventure. We went aloft single file, the lamp-circle pushing back the darkness.

Into the room where my father had placed the body.

And it was a perplexing thing, what had transpired upon the body.

It was vanishing—shrinking and becoming nothing under the sheet with which my father had covered it. His face and the face of my mother were abrim with questions unasked and unanswered.

But the terror and the loathing and the balancing on the rim of insanity were gone. There was nothing here. Only some curious covered thing shrinking away beneath a sheet.

With an air of abstract investigation, my father lifted the sheet. My mother caught her breath but said nothing.

The form was already gone. Only a disagreeable mass remained and, as we watched, that too seemed to shrink and become less than it had been before. Father dropped the sheet back into place and we filed downstairs.

UPON THE following day—we had been forbidden the second floor—my father went aloft shortly before sundown. He returned to the living room carrying something in his hand covered by a towel; a small something that scarce burdened his palm.

"Come," he said.

We went with him out of doors, to the pounding side of the island where we stood upon the rocks and watched the sea beat and reach up toward us.

My father extended his hand out over the lip of the rock, turned it palm down and drew back the towel.

Something fell down and down into the water. Like a handful of wet ash; like a scraping of refuse taken away in order to make some small place cleaner.

"It came from the sea," my father said. "And to the sea it must be returned."

He wiped his hand on the towel and we returned to the house he had built for us there on the edge of the deep and unknown ocean.

As we were about to enter, he stopped. "Nothing more will ever be said about this. It is over. Done with. We will never speak of it again."

And we never did.

THE END

ONE OF the most important mechanical developments the world has ever known, took place in the primitive age—the invention of the bow and arrow. Primitive man had learned that flint rock could be chipped into a sharp and pointed instrument which could be fastened in the end of a shaft, thus making a spear that could be stabbed or thrown into the body of a beast with deadly effect. This practice, in fact, is still in use among all of the uncivilized tribes today.

This was the simple process of developing the bow: a piece of flexible wood was bent into the shape of a segment of a circle and held in this position by a piece of animal skin attached to each end of the stick. By their using a smaller flint-tipped shaft, the arrow came into being. The flint-tipped arrow could be propelled instantly and accurately for great distances,



by flexing the bow into a larger segment and by suddenly releasing the string.

The use of the bow and arrow became the common weapon for all mankind. It was used by all men, everywhere, at one time or another. It was the weapon that had the most far-reaching effect in helping man develop a state of civilization.

The LAUGHTER of SHIRU

There were three thousand steps a man had to climb before he reached Shiru – and once there he might never return – alive!



The steps seemed to stretch up endlessly to the glittering, somehow evil, idol...



By Gerald Vance

BETWEEN them on the desk the great green jewel lay, mysterious, compelling. The man across the desk from Erson eyed it speculatively. He was a big man, massive, almost as big and massive as Erson.

But his interest was not strong enough. Not yet.

In Erson's hand the black metal cane throbbed. In his mind words formed. And in his ears there was

the laughter of Shiru.

Erson hadn't wanted to seek out this man, but he had sought him out. He hadn't wanted to show the jewel, but he had showed it. He didn't want to say the words, but with the laughter in his ears he would say them.

"One brings one," Shiru had said. Erson would bring one.

"There are three thousand steps to Shiru, and I climbed every single one of them," Erson said.

They were twenty stories above the Hudson River and through the open window a cool breeze blew. But with the words the breeze was gone for Erson, and in its place was Shiru and the women of Shiru—and the laughter of Shiru.

"Three thousand steps," Erson said again, and knew by the light in the other's eyes that he had won him.

Just as with those words Mattick had won *him*. With the very same words....

* * *

Oklahoma. One hundred and ten degrees in the shade, and there was no shade. The metal on the rigs was too hot to touch. It was no day for drilling, but they drilled anyway. Erson had his troubles.

On a day like this an oil-rig man could be mean as sin, but Erson handled them anyway. Under his sopping shirt the enormous muscles bunched and flowed. Wrestler, fighter, circus strong man, and now a rig boss; Erson could handle them.

But afterward it was good to taste a cold beer. Erson stood at the bar and let golden brew slide down his parched throat and watched the beads form on the glass.

It was the man alongside him who started the conversation. He was a bull of a man in a cheap denim outfit. Apparently crippled, Erson noticed, for he carried a black cane.

"Nothing like beer in this weather," the bull-built man said.

"Yeah."

The stranger's eyes, sunk in craggy brows, appraised Erson. He nodded his dark, massive head, apparently liking what he saw.

"A man like you could make it," he muttered.

Erson was about to ask him *what* he could make, but just then a couple of the drillers came in. Tall, leathery, they glared about with eyes reddened

by the heavy, broiling sun.

"Have a beer," Erson called. "On me."

They told him what he could do with his beer. Erson laughed, refusing to take an insult. They swung toward him, their faces hard with purpose.

"Take it easy," he said. "It's the same job for all of us."

"You and your job," one of them cursed.

They had split up, coming at him from both sides, and Erson could see that this was real trouble. He got his back against the bar and waited. Maybe they were only blowing off steam.

But they weren't. A fist lashed out, catching Erson on the cheek. From the other side came another blow, rocking his head. The drillers bored in, ready to use their boots as he fell.

Erson caught them as they came in, one in each hand. He gathered their shirts at the chest and lifted them off the floor and shook them until their heads rolled and only the whites of their eyes showed. Then he flung them away from him.

Beside him the craggy man grunted. "You could make it, all right," he said.

"Make *what*?"

"Shiru," the man said. He looked around cautiously. "Where can I talk to you alone?"

What the devil was this? Erson wondered. But he wasn't the scary kind; he never had been. He shrugged. Might be interesting.

"My room," Erson said. "Got to change clothes anyway."

IN ERSON'S room the burly man, whose name was Mattick, sat on a chair while Erson got his shirt off and put on a fresh one. With his shirt off, Erson looked broader than ever and Mattick nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Yes." He took a green object from his pocket and handed it to Erson.

It was much like glass and green as glass and about as large as a pullet egg. And within it green lights glowed.

"What is it?" Erson asked.

"An emerald."

Erson's eyes widened with sudden interest. *An emerald!* He knew little about precious stones, but he knew this much: a true emerald that size was worth a fortune.

"From Shiru?" he guessed shrewdly. Mattick nodded.

"What is Shiru?" Erson wanted to know. "A city? A place?"

"A place," Mattick said. "A people. A way of life. And also—Shiru."

He was talking, but he wasn't saying much, and even that in a cryptic way. Erson rubbed his jaw.

"You said I could make it. And you show me this stone, as though there might be more."

"As many as even you could carry."

"Do I make it alone?"

"With me."

It was interesting, damned interesting. But there was something Erson didn't like about the thing. Emeralds? Emeralds were money, and money is always interesting, especially in quantity.

And yet—. No, he didn't think so.

Mattick caught his mood and hurried to speak, hurrying as though he had to get the words out. And yet the words came slowly.

"There are three thousand steps to Shiru, and I climbed every single one of them," Mattick said.

And the balance swung. Something about the words, something about the way he said them; and in Erson's mind was the knowledge that he would go with Mattick.

"Three thousand steps. I climbed

them to get out; I'd climb them to get back in if I had to."

What it was, Erson didn't know. Mystery, adventure, maybe the picture in his mind of a man climbing three thousand steps. But against all that, only a job in the oilfields.

"I'll go," he said simply. "If you got out once, we can do it again."

"You may not *want* to leave Shiru," Mattick said, and he laughed.

Erson didn't know it then, but the laugh was the laugh of Shiru, thin and high and in a minor, crazy key that played along his vertebrae and made each of them icy.

IT WAS somewhere in South America. That much Erson found out when he and Mattick booked passage at an agency in New Orleans three days later. The tickets were one way to Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Mattick had changed a good deal. He was no longer lost in thought. A light glowed within him, eager and bright. He was like a sailor almost in sight of port.

But that seemed natural enough. He'd been a man needing help, a partner who could hold up his end of a rough deal, if the end was worth holding. And he'd found the partner.

More than what he had told Erson in the beginning, Mattick did not divulge. But Erson had discovered a few things. For one, Mattick was not crippled, not even slightly lame.

And yet he was never without the queer metallic cane. He held it even when he slept! Moreover, held it in a grip of iron, his fingers curled around the head as though he couldn't let go if he wanted.

Even when his life was in danger, Mattick refused to give up his grip on the cane. And that was one of the strangest among many strange things Erson noticed.

It happened their third day at sea.

A sailor with a belly full of cheap whiskey and a head too long in the sun ran amuck. He came out of the galley with a cleaver in his hand and raced straight for Mattick, who stood at the rail with his eyes glued southward.

"Look out!" Erson yelled.

Mattick whirled, saw that the sailor was almost upon him. There was no time to run, nowhere he could run to; he was trapped by the rail and a lifeboat hanging on his right.

With a certain bearlike agility, Mattick ducked. The sailor's arm went over Mattick's shoulder. Before the sailor could recover, Mattick smashed a short blow to his head with his own free left hand. The sailor staggered and Mattick clubbed him again, still using only one hand.

By that time Erson was there. He caught the cleaver-swinging arm as it came up, stopped it dead. Erson squeezed and the cleaver dropped from paralyzed fingers.

Shock and pain brought reality back to the seaman's brain. He stared stupidly, hardly realizing what had happened, as Erson shoved him into the rail and pinned him there. A moment later the first mate was leading the seaman away.

"Man!" Erson snorted. "That was no time to play it one-handed. The cane would have done it. Why didn't you use it on him?"

"Yes, the cane would have done it," Mattick said softly. But that was all he said. There was no explanation.

Erson stared at him with narrowed eyes. A certain amount Erson was willing to take on faith, but no more. Mattick had let him keep the emerald; and that meant a great deal. The emerald was genuine, as an excited jeweler had assured Erson; and that meant a great deal. But still—

"This," he said softly, "is either a fifty-fifty deal or it isn't."

"It is. Whatever I get, you'll get."

"No. I mean other things. Like that cane, for instance."

"If it's necessary, you'll learn about the cane. But it won't be from me." Mattick's eyes were hard.

"And why *me*?" Erson persisted. "There are plenty of men with muscle and guts. Why *me*?"

"Just chance. Is that good enough? If not, you're right; it *could* be someone else. I can start looking around."

Hot words came to Erson's lips, but he held them back. Mattick had put it bluntly. He could take it as it was, or quit. And he wasn't about to quit.

"I thought so," Mattick said. "You're like me; muscles, guts, and you've got to find out. Perfect for Shiru."

And he laughed softly, the laugh climbing and falling in strangely ordered cadences as though following a definite scale, but a scale not of this world.

Erson fought back a shiver.

ON THE tenth day out of Guayaquil Erson knew they were getting close. It showed in Mattick's eyes, in a hot and frantic gleam that drove him forward through the steaming jungle.

They had paused long enough in Guayaquil to load a pair of pack horses with food, but no more. Not even a rifle, not even a compass, as far as Erson could see.

Down the east slope of the towering Andes and into the *montana*, the jungle. It was hotter than Oklahoma had been, and more humid. Clothes stuck soggly to the wearer, seemed to grow in weight until a shirt was a suit of armor fresh from the forge.

A green hell, someone had once called this jungle, and Erson learned the truth in the phrase. Through an almost impenetrable mass of under-

growth and overgrowth he and Mattick made their way. For hours each day, long after ordinary men would have dropped with exhaustion, they plodded forward.

It was a place in which to fall, to die, to rot. But Mattick moved confidently on without hesitation.

It was the cane. Erson knew that now for certain. In some mysterious way it guided Mattick.

Erson studied it, trying to divine how it worked. He came up alongside Mattick, nonchalantly brushed his hand against the black metallic stick. And bit his teeth to keep back a cry of pain!

The cane was hot! It had been cool on board ship, the only other time Erson had touched it. But now it was hot as fire! How Mattick could hold it was another mystery to be pondered.

"How much farther?" Erson asked, quickly covering his surprise.

"Not much," Mattick said, and laughed his laugh. That came often to his lips now, Erson had noticed. "Tired?"

"No." Erson was dropping back again.

"Another night's camp. That's all," Mattick said. He paused suddenly. "What was that?"

Erson froze in his tracks. He had heard it too. But whether it had been a shriek, a scream, a howl, he couldn't tell.

"Some animal," Mattick said. "Come on."

"No. Wait."

It had come again, much closer now, more sharply defined. Erson tensed, shifting his weight to the balls of his feet.

"An animal," Mattick said again, this time sharply. "Come on!"

But it hadn't been an animal. Erson knew that. And he knew Mattick knew it. It had been the scream of a

woman, a woman in mortal fear!

And it hadn't been too far off.

Mattick tried to get in his way, but Erson was too quick. He stiff-armed Mattick, knocking him off balance. Mattick could stay where he was, or he could follow. Somehow Erson knew that Mattick would not let him go alone.

The cry had come from their left, and in that direction Erson ran. Green fingers clutched at him, underfoot writhing vines tried to trip him.

This time the cry was close. Erson stumbled, rolled like a cat and came up still running. He came around a thick tree trunk and burst into a clearing.

It was a girl. A girl where no girl should have been! A girl with blonde hair uncovered as her pith helmet had rolled to the ground.

And around her a dozen brown skinned savages in loin cloths who ripped at her clothes as they bore her to the ground.

ERSON hit them like a thunderbolt. His fists crunched bones and pulped flesh. But these small brown men were nimble. Four were down for good. The rest got out of the way.

And they were not afraid. Savages certainly, their appearance showed that much. But not cowards. They came back at Erson, eight to his one, and circling rapidly to take him from all sides. Four of them produced long bladed knives.

It was then Mattick appeared. He paused for a moment, seemingly uncertain. And then, unwillingly, the cane in his hand came up.

Nothing happened. At least nothing that Erson could see. But the brown men stopped short. They were not cowards, but they were afraid. In eight throats at once a cry of horror vibrated shrilly.

"Shiru!"

And they were gone, running as though their lives depended on their prompt disappearance from the scene. Foliage closed in behind them. Only Erson, Mattick and the girl remained.

She was struggling to her feet, only now realizing that her immediate danger was over. Erson helped her steady herself, then turned aside while she attempted to work the tatters which remained of her blouse and skirt into a concealing pattern.

She succeeded only partially, large portions of tanned, smooth skin remaining uncovered. Not over twenty-five, she was tall, athletic appearing without any loss of womanly roundness.

"I..." She swayed and Erson had to grab her arm.

After a moment she was able to go on. "Where did you come from?"

"We were just a little way off. Heard you scream and hotfooted it over."

Mattick interrupted. "Where did you come from?"

The question brought fresh horror to her eyes. It was only after several minutes that she could speak coherently again.

And a short story at that. A handful of anthropologists on a university grant, working their way into deep jungle for a first hand study of primitive tribes. Suddenly, while pitching camp, these savages had struck.

"We had guns, of course. But they came out of nowhere and we never got a chance to use the guns. I was at the edge of the clearing. By the time I turned they were already slashing away with their knives. I just ran. They came after me."

Mattick looked sorry the natives hadn't caught her sooner. "Well, I guess if you could find your way here, you'll get back all right."

"What do you mean?" Erson de-

manded. "Leave her to get out of this jungle alone?"

"We can't take her with us," Mattick said flatly.

"Sorry," Erson told him just as flatly. "I'd like a bushel of that green stuff, but I'm not leaving a woman alone in the jungle. You can go on, Mattick. I'll stay with her."

Mattick's face drained of color. "No! You can't go back now! We're almost there!"

"I don't care if we've got one foot in the door."

"But you don't understand," Mattick pleaded. "Outside women are not allowed in—"

"Then maybe I'd better stay out too." He paused, went on, "You don't need me anyway."

Mattick backtracked frantically. "Oh, all right. But she's coming along at her own risk."

He turned away quickly, glad to let the matter drop there. He seemed ready to stalk off, but remained rooted to the spot where he stood.

"We couldn't have been over a hundred yards away," he said. "But I don't know which way."

"There." Erson pointed.

And that was not the least of the mysteries, Erson thought. A man with no sense of direction and no compass, yet able to find his way unerringly through the thickest jungle. The cane had something to do with that too.

HE WENT to sleep knowing he'd have to watch Mattick from now on. There had been a glint in Mattick's eyes that boded Ilma Groves (that was the girl's name) no good.

Altogether, Mattick was acting strangely. He was wildly excited. But he was also wildly fearful since the girl had joined them. Erson could see that she might be a great burden if they ran into trouble. Yet to leave her to the mercy of the jungle was un-

thinkably brutal.

Erson stirred uncomfortably. Under the layer of leaves on which he lay the ground was hard and uneven. That didn't seem to bother Mattick, who snored away on his own bed of leaves.

They'd given the tent to the girl and had made their beds on either side of the flap, only a few feet off. Erson watched the flap move fitfully, shaken by a moisture laden breeze. And at last he fell asleep.

How long he slept he did not know. But he came awake with the instant awareness of the trained athlete, his eyes probing the darkness.

What had awakened him? A sound? The jungle hummed with its ceaseless nocturnal activity, but he had grown used to that. Erson peered into the half darkness, realized suddenly that he must have turned his head in his sleep and was now facing a wall of foliage.

Slowly, gently, he let his head come around until he again faced the tent. Mattick! The burly man stood at the flap, one hand holding it wide open. The other hand was raised, the cane in it slanted downward like a sword.

And ready to strike!

Erson rolled, his great thighs bunching. There was no time left. A word might stop Mattick. But tensed as he was, it might also galvanize him into action.

Like a panther after prey, Erson sprang. Steel fingers closed on Mattick's arms, flung him earthward. For a moment Erson's grip was broken.

Reflexively, Mattick swung the cane. Just as reflexively, Erson flashed out a hand to seize it. He caught it, had it.

And let it go with an involuntary gasp of pain! It was hot, hotter than boiling water!

How Mattick could hold it, Erson

couldn't imagine. And yet the big dark man's fingers were clenched so tightly about the top of it that Erson knew nothing could jar it loose.

By now Mattick was aware of what must have happened. He could see Erson so close beside him. He whispered hoarsely.

"Wait!"

"You dirty murdering—"

"No. You don't understand. It may be her life or ours. One brings one. And not a woman. Shiru—"

"Nothing's worth that," Erson whispered hoarsely. "Not if Shiru is paved with six feet of gold."

"Don't say that! You can't know, you've never been there."

Mattick was pleading now. And there was that in his voice which had caught Erson the first time they spoke in his room. It was more than Mattick's voice; in it was the mystery of Shiru.

"All right," Erson grunted. "But let her alone. Get that? Let her alone."

HE KNEW Mattick wouldn't try anything more, and yet he couldn't be absolutely certain. Mattick would do anything, even kill, to get back to Shiru.

And if only for that one remaining reason, Erson wanted to finish this search. Whatever it was to draw a man like that, it must be worth finding.

Yet he was wary. Mattick travelled in front, leading the way. The girl was in the middle, with Erson bringing up the rear. They moved forward purposefully but with no indication of nearing a goal.

"How much further?" Erson demanded. It was high noon, as much as they could tell by the light which filtered through the overhang.

"Soon. Soon." Mattick was trembling with excitement, hardly touching the tinned meat Erson had handed

him as his scanty share.

Unable to contain himself, Mattick flung the meat aside.

"Come on!" he snarled.

"Five minutes more won't hurt," Erson said calmly.

He helped Ilma, who had sat down to rest, to her feet. She was feeling better today, but still pale from her recent shock. Fortunately, they had not awakened her with their brief struggle.

They went forward. There was still no intimation of any change in their surroundings. The jungle was too thick for them to see far ahead. As a man at sea loses the concept of land temporarily, so the jungle seemed infinite.

And then, suddenly, there was no jungle!

It lay behind them now, hidden by the almost impenetrable mass of boles and fronds through which they had just come. For perhaps a hundred yards ahead there was only black, barren ground.

And out of that ground a wall, rising, sheerly perpendicular for over two thousand feet, a natural wall of rock as dark almost as the ground itself. And stretching out and around toward the peaks of the Andes on one side, vanishing in a semicircle on the other.

"Shiru?" Erson asked. The question was unnecessary,

"On the other side," Mattick said.

The weird laugh bubbled out of him, bubbled on and on. He had reached the end of his journey. But how they were going to get over that wall of rock, Erson couldn't divine.

"We better start around," he suggested.

"There is no way around," Mattick told him. And laughed again.

Ilma was studying the rock. "Volcanic, probably."

Mattick disregarded her. "You'll see what the cane is for, now."

And now he was almost running forward, impatience prodding him. Behind him Erson and the girl came. They saw Mattick raise his cane, draw a line downward on the face of the rock.

Where the cane touched, the rock dissolved! Line after line, frantically, crookedly drawn, each leaving a deep hollow. Line followed line, hollow followed hollow, each coming with incredible swiftness.

There was a niche, then the start of a tunnel. Nothing for Erson and Ilma Groves to do but follow Mattick.

How long they tunneled, they had no notion. But all at once a line produced a streak of light. Then another. They were through. Erson turned to see how far they had come, how thick the rock was.

And gasped. "It's grown back together behind us!"

Mattick paid no heed. He was leading them forward out of the base of the mountain to stand on the edge of a valley that sloped slightly downward, perhaps two miles long, about a half mile wide.

A cultivated field lay almost at the other end of the valley, with crops of some sort in varying degrees of height and maturity. A small settlement near the field. A throng of people, small at this distance, huddled at the far base of the mountain that enclosed them.

And high above them, immense, obscene, a figure apparently carved out of the living rock! A perpendicular stairway climbed upward, climbed over the idol's distended belly, between its protruding dugs, climbed up its wrinkled throat and over its chin.

And continued to climb between two black tusks of teeth into the very mouth of the idol!

"Shiru?" Erson murmured. Mattick nodded.

And then through the valley came the laugh of Shiru, the laugh that Mattick had laughed, high and thin and crazily tuneful.

ILMA GROVES was no longer pale and apathetic. Excitement gripped her, putting fresh color in her cheeks and an eager light in her eyes. She scanned the unscalable walls of rock that enclosed the valley.

"There's no other way to get in?" she asked Mattick.

"None."

"A dream," she breathed. "A completely isolated culture. The culture we said couldn't exist!"

Her fervor might have been scientific, but it made her beautiful. She had forgotten her tatters and her modesty. Erson's throat went dry as something hot rose up within him. He shook his mind back to calmness.

"Ugly thing," he said, his nod indicating the idol.

"Remarkable," she demurred. "Some sort of beast-human representation. Notice the rudimentary legs below, sort of like a dog's. And the face is half bird, half human."

"Come on," Mattick snapped and started forward.

"Wait." Erson jerked his head at the girl. "What about her? You said—"

"You insisted she should come. Shiru will decide what to do with her."

Left to his own devices, Erson might have proceeded more cautiously. And yet there was little place for concealment. A small amount of growth lay along the side of the valley on which they stood. Dark areas on the rocks gave promise of at least small caves.

Mattick was moving, though, and there was nothing to do but follow him. The laughter came forward toward them, yet not growing louder. And with the laughter a sort of underlying murmur, rising and falling.

"They're praying to it!" Ilma said. "Some kind of chant."

As she spoke the murmur stopped. The people, who had been prostrate, were rising to their feet. The group, only several hundred at the most, was breaking up.

A small number moved toward the cultivated field at the right. The rest came in a solid body straight toward Erson, Mattick and the girl.

"They've seen us!" Ilma said.

"They've known we were here all along," Mattick told her.

Somewhere inside Erson a memory stirred, a memory passed along gene to gene from an ancestor dead a hundred thousand years. Hair rose on the back of Erson's neck and from inside him, unbidden and unlearned, a deep growl rose.

A WOMAN led them, and most of of the rest were women. Behind, in their wake, came the men, only thirty or forty of them. And the men were a strange lot.

Of every nation they seemed to be, and of many a time and place. Several wore the garb of the Conquistadores, two looked like men who might have been with Kidd at the sack of Maracaibo. Here such as could have made the New World with Leif the Lucky; there another and darker haired who might have made it with Balboa. An Englishman. An American.

All bigger than most men. And all alike in one thing. Their eyes were dull, their movements stiff, their skin as bloodless as a shroud.

Strange men, and yet the women of Shiru were stranger still.

Lips as red as blood, and skin as white as milk, and hair like spider silk and black and dry. They wore single garments, sleeveless and thin as gauze.

Beneath the garments their breasts were high and full, their hips slim, the lines of their loins and thighs as

graceful as the petals of a carnivorous plant, as alluring, as consuming.

Erson shot a quick glance at Mattick. "What do we do now?"

Mattick didn't even hear him. Erson had a quick sinking feeling at the pit of his stomach. The veil of pretense was down. Emeralds might be here aplenty, but Mattick wasn't really interested in them.

The burly man's face was aglow as he watched the women come on. He took a few steps forward to meet them, gazed directly into the eyes of the leader.

"I have returned to Shiru," he said. "I have come back to stay."

He held out the cane and the women took it easily from his hand. Her eyes shifted then to Erson, appraising him, taking in the height and breadth of him. She smiled.

"Welcome back," she said. Her voice was soft and cool. "You have done well."

To Erson she said, "Welcome to Shiru. I am Mala, Priestess of Shiru."

Her voice was lulling, almost hypnotic. In her emerald green eyes there were depths in which a cold flame burned, in which a man could lose himself forever.

The eyes flickered to Ilma and were momentarily masked, then came back to Erson. There was an invitation as old as the earth, and the promise of something even older.

"You are tired," Mala said. "First Shiru will welcome you and then you will have food and drink and rest. Come."

There was nothing to do but follow her. She led the way down onto the level floor of the valley, toward the group of houses and the stairway that led upward to Shiru.

It was only when they came close that they realized the true immensity of the idol. The stairway that led upward over it was ten feet wide, yet

it might have been but a wrinkle in the idol's skin. Each step was more than a foot high and Mattick had said there were three thousand of them. Looking upward along the almost unscalable pitch of the staircase, Erson could believe that.

Mala threw herself forward, face down, and was followed by the rest of the women and men. Mattick, too prostrated himself. Only Erson and Ilma remained standing.

From Mala's mouth came sibilant phrases in a strange tongue. A chant, a prayer, an invocation perhaps, but nothing Erson could understand. And from above came the laughter of Shiru, to be echoed a moment later by his worshippers.

MATTICK had been installed by himself in one of the dwellings, low and built of the dark rock. Now Ilma, Erson and Mala walked toward another of the houses, not far off.

A hundred feet or so beyond the farthest house were the fields they had noticed. But what had appeared from their previous elevation as a mound was now revealed as a ten foot wall between them and the cultivated area.

"This one is for you," Mala told Ilma, indicating one of the houses.

"No!" Ilma's refusal was sharp, a note of fear riding the word. "I want to stay with him."

Was there a momentary flicker of anger in Mala's eyes? Erson couldn't tell, it was gone so swiftly.

"Of course, if you wish," she murmured, smiling, and led them inside together.

A large couch, a table, some chairs, all apparently made of the same dark rock of which the building itself was constructed. A few gourds hanging. And from three high openings came light which glinted green off baubles carelessly tossed about.

Abruptly, Mala left them. They were alone.

"Well," Erson said, rubbing his jaw thoughtfully.

"I—I'm afraid."

"Yeah," he grunted. "Queer setup. They act friendly enough, though." He squinted at the girl. "You're supposed to know something about odd religions and customs, aren't you? Like that business they just went through."

She was thoughtful. "It seems like some kind of totemism."

"But what about that laugh?" Erson couldn't repress a chill.

"That could be produced by the wind blowing through a series of pipes."

It seemed a fair possibility to Erson. The laugh had followed a definite pattern. And it was by just such tricks that primitive peoples were impressed. And yet, the thought persisted, these women were not primitive.

"It's—it's not just the ceremony," Ilma said. "I've seen many more strange than that. But the other things. The men, for instance."

"Zombies."

"You're joking, because you don't believe in zombies. But this is no joke. And if each of them is what he appears to be, if each is wearing *his own* clothing—" She broke off. "No. That's impossible!"

"Take it easy," Erson cautioned. She was shaking like a leaf. He tried to inject a little humor. "I was more interested in the ladies, anyway. Couldn't help it, with what *they* wear."

She refused to be sidetracked. "You don't understand! It's not the things we can see. It's those we haven't seen. There are men, there are women. But where are the children? Why are there no children?"

It was something Erson hadn't thought of. The women were young.

So were the men. But there were no oldsters, no youngsters. It was a people Time had forgotten.

BEFORE he could give it any further consideration Mala was back, bringing with her a gourd from which came a sloshing sound. She set the gourd on the table.

"Drink this. It will refresh you. Soon darkness will come and you may sleep."

That was all, and she was gone, hurrying out as though on urgent business. Erson and the girl watched through the open door as Mala hastened toward a small group of men and women who had come through a huge doorway in the wall that separated the houses and the field.

The men carried large gourds which might have served as watering cans. But that was not what interested Erson most. These men were small and brown skinned, much like the natives who had attacked Ilma's party!

Mala's voice drifted back, peremptorily questioning. She spoke in a language Erson didn't understand. His face betrayed his puzzlement.

"It's a native dialect," Ilma told him. "She's asking how many will ripen tonight."

Whatever the answer, Mala must have been satisfied for she asked no further questions. Until she had vanished into one of the houses, the brown men stood still. Then they continued on their way, their movements strangely mechanical.

"Apparently a three-caste society, with the women the ruling caste," Ilma said, trying, by using a matter of fact objectivity, to keep herself calm. And not succeeding.

"Why the wall?" Erson wondered.

"Some primitive people believe evil spirits steal crops, or keep them from growing."

"Could be." Erson blinked his

eyes. "What the—!"

Without warning darkness had come. One moment it was the day, the next moment night. Stumbling through the darkness, Ilma found Erson and gripped his arm.

"It's nothing," he assured her. "We're surrounded by sheer mountains. The instant the sun drops behind them it's dark. But we'll get adjusted in a minute or so."

He was right. After a short wait they found that the blackness was not as intense as it seemed. A faint luminosity was there, giving even more distant objects dark form. Even inside the room they could make out the table, the chairs, the couch.

"Let's try to get out," Ilma whispered.

"Haven't seen any way we could," Erson grunted.

As far as he could see, Mattick had led him into an enormous pit from which there was no escape. For what reason, Erson could not begin to imagine. Until he found out, however, there was no point in useless worry.

"Let's have some of this stuff Mala brought. I could use a little nourishment."

He took the gourd from the table and handed it to the girl and watched her lift it to her lips. She tilted the gourd, tasted gingerly.

"Ugh!" She set it down at once, shuddering with distaste.

"What's the matter?" Erson asked.

"I...don't know. I'm just afraid to drink it, that's all."

"Here." He took it from her hands, sipped cautiously. It tasted strange, salty, but not unpleasant.

He was about to drink a deeper draught when the girl sprang at him. Her hand came around in an arc, knocking the gourd from his grasp. It fell, the liquid gurgling across the floor.

"There's something evil in it! I can

feel it!"

Erson shrugged. "Could be. But we're going to be awful hungry if we don't find something else to eat soon."

THERE WAS a long silence. It was only a question of time. Sooner or later, whether they wanted to or not, they would have to eat and drink what they were given.

"Mattick would know," Erson said suddenly.

The thought had just struck him. Mattick would know a good many things. Mattick had been here before. He had got out. And if Mattick could make his way out of this place, so could he.

"I'm going to have a talk with Mattick," Erson whispered.

"He won't help us. The moment we came here I could sense that."

"He'll help," Erson said grimly. "Now don't get worried. I'll be gone just a little while."

He slipped out into the darkness and went around to the back. There were no lights anywhere, but as he stole along, counting the houses, he could hear murmurous sounds.

It was the twelfth house back, he was sure of that. Now, if only Mattick were alone. But as Erson raised his eyes above the level of the window, he found that Mattick was not alone.

Alongside the burly form on the couch inside, there was another form, a figure in a white, gauzelike garment. The woman was silent, but from Mattick's lips came a strange babble.

Cursing to himself, Erson sped back. He had barely a moment to tell Ilma that Mattick hadn't been alone. And then there was a flicker of light outside. Footsteps approached. It was Mala.

"Are you comfortable?"

Erson assured her they were, saw her eyes go over his shoulder to the pool of liquid on the floor. He hast-

ened to explain it had slipped from his hands.

"Unfortunate. It would have done you good." She beckoned to Ilma "Come now."

"I want to stay here."

Mala's eyes burned green in the torchlight but her expression betrayed nothing. "It is our custom. Do not be afraid, you will not be harmed. And you may be in the very next house."

To refuse further would have made a serious issue of the matter. There was nothing for Ilma to do but agree. She followed Mala out and Erson watched them go into the next house, only thirty or forty feet away.

He was sitting on the hard divan when Mala returned a half hour later. She carried another gourd from which she sipped ostentatiously before handing it to Erson. She knew, then, he thought, that the other gourd had not slipped by accident.

Her eyes bored into Erson's.

HE LIFTED the gourd, drank deeply. Still that strange, salty taste, but definitely invigorating. He braced himself, shot a question at her.

"Why was Mattick so anxious to come back here?"

There was no answer. That was something only Mattick could supply, she seemed to mean by her smile. And Mattick, Erson knew somehow, wouldn't tell any more than he already had. Erson tried another tack.

"We're free to leave, aren't we?"

"Few men wish to leave Shiru. Mattick was the first in a long time. And he came back."

She was delicately trying to edge him deeper into the room. For some reason Erson dallied near the doorway. He stayed long enough to see something odd.

A small figure appeared, coming

from one of the houses further along. One of the brown skinned men, Erson was sure. The figure moved jerkily, then suddenly collapsed like a sack of meal.

Two women came from the house and stood looking down at the small man. One touched the figure with her foot. It remained limp. The woman returned to the house and came out again with something that looked like a spade.

Together, she and the other woman carried the limp figure toward the huge doorway in the wall. The great door swung open, closed behind them. For all the world, Erson thought, like a burial detail.

Erson felt a vague uneasiness, but only vague. The drink must have done something to him. He felt dreamy, with a strange tingling of the senses. Mala's hand on his arm was soft and cool.

"You must be very strong," she said.

She was leading him to the divan, sitting beside him, her hand still on his arm. Erson found her nearness exciting, felt himself drawn to her.

"You musn't speak of leaving. Shiru needs you," she murmured, her lips close to his ear. "And you need Shiru."

Strange words in his ear, soft and lulling. Love eternal, and more. His head was on her breast, his arms about her, fondling her. And her arms were about him, drawing him close.

He was being drawn into a great, cool darkness that enveloped him. He sought for Mala's lips and was denied them. This was a strange love, a love that consumed.

Unable to resist, unwilling to resist, Erson went toward it eagerly. Mala's fingers played through his hair, her lips were pressed to his throat. He was lost, lost forever.

A scream cut through the night.

MALA WAS gone, suddenly. Erson lay still, drifting in a haze of unreality. He had known women, known passion. But those women were repugnant now, that passion clumsy.

This was what he wanted, to belong to Mala now and forever. To lie in her arms and let her draw into her coolness his warmth and strength. To become pliable in her hands. That was happiness.

"Erson!"

It was a whisper out of the darkness. It came again. The girl. Ilma, calling his name.

Erson heard her, but did not answer. When he knew she had come into the room he turned his head lazily and saw her form. She could tell he was awake.

"Did you hear that scream?"

"Mala will see to it," Erson said dreamily. "Go away."

Her hands went to her mouth. "She . . . she's *done* something to you!"

"Go away. I want only Mala."

"No! No!" She was pleading not only for herself but for him. "Can't you see she is evil? Can't you see they're all evil? Cold as the gravel!"

"Go away," Erson muttered.

What was a woman like this compared to Mala? A creature of flesh and blood against a cold goddess of the night, a goddess who could bring him love everlasting and life eternal, of secret delights beyond the flesh.

"Mala will come back to me," he murmured.

"No!" With the knowledge born in the first woman she fought for his soul. "She's not a woman. She has nothing to give you, can't you see that? She wants only to take!"

She had to rouse him, had to bring him out of his limbo into which he had been seduced. What sorcery, what powers Mala had used she could sense only by intuition. Against them she had only herself. And her in-

stinct that is ageless in women.

Erson tried to roll away from her as she threw herself on the divan beside him. But she was too quick. Her arms were around him, drawing him close.

Her lips were hot on his, her breath warm in his mouth as his own lips parted. Her tattered blouse was no bar between her flesh and his. Under his hands her skin was warm.

Coolness had begotten coolness, a dulling of reaction. Now warmth begot warmth. Against his will Erson found himself responding. His heart hammered as his big hands slid across the girl's bare back and pressed her closer.

Apathy was gone, passion in its place. For cold goddesses there might be dark gods. But for a man of flesh and blood there was need for the same kind of woman, for a woman who could make his blood run hot, who could bring the strength surging up in him.

"**YOU'RE HURTING** me," Ilma said.

His head still reeling, Erson let her go. She twisted away and got to her feet and he followed her. They were close in the dim room.

"You're all right now?"

"Yeah," he said. "I'm all right." It was taking a minute to get his bearings, to assimilate all that had happened.

She had her arms crossed over her heaving breasts. Erson chuckled. It wouldn't help her embarrassment any, but he couldn't resist saying it.

"One time the cure was better than the disease."

And then he was all seriousness. There was evil here that could steal a man's soul and drain the vitality from his body so that he was left a living shell.

"We've got to get out of here."

Fast!" Erson was tensely elated.

He grabbed Ilma's arm roughly and pulled her along behind him, feeling a fresh sense of freedom as they came outdoors. The moon was rising now and its light was being reflected down into this vale of mystery and horror.

Mattick would know the way out of Shiru. And Mattick would tell, whether he wanted to or not. Erson's hands clenched spasmodically as he counted off the houses.

This time Mattick was alone, still lying on the divan and apparently asleep. Erson shook him, watched his eyes open and his head come around. Mattick had scratched or cut himself; there was blood clotting on his throat.

"Get up!" Erson snarled.

He dragged Mattick to his feet and was dismayed to find him limp. He had to prop him against the wall to keep him erect. And then he saw Mattick's eyes.

They were the eyes of the other men in this infernal place! Dull and unseeing. Or perhaps still seeing things no man might see and retain his soul.

"How do we get out of here?" Erson demanded.

For reply Mattick laughed. Erson's heart sank. He doubted that Mattick even remembered him. With a feeling of loathing he released his grip, expecting Mattick to fall. Instead, Mattick made his way back to the divan with robotlike steps.

"What have they done to him?" Ilma whispered.

"I don't know. He's gone, though. We'll never get anything out of him."

The voice of defeat whispered in Erson's ear, telling him it was hopeless without Mattick's help. There was no way out.

And yet there *was* a way! What had Mattick said the first time they met? Something about the steps. He

had climbed the three thousand steps, he'd told Erson.

It must be that. There was no other way. And if Mattick had climbed them, he could climb them.

The thought galvanized Erson into action. It was only a matter of time until Mala came back and discovered he was gone. He had to act fast.

Without speaking he moved to the door, leaving Ilma to follow. He paused a moment. In the heightening moonlight the figure of Shiru was clear, the steps mounting endlessly in a silvery ribbon.

And coming toward them from the base of the steps was a procession! They were trapped!

ANOTHER minute or two and there would be no escape. Erson's mind raced. Somehow they had to get out of sight, get around this ghostly group that was already drawing so close.

"Come on!"

He and the girl darted back around the corner of the house. There was a clear space, and then the wall that separated the dwellings from the cultivated field. It took only a moment to reach the wall. Once over it they would be safe for a while.

Ten feet high and with no handholds. But that was no problem. Erson went back a few steps, came forward at a run. He leaped.

Only the tips of his fingers went over the top. But that was enough; those fingers had the strength of grappling hooks. A heave, he had a knee up. All that remained was to reach down for Ilma's upstretched hand and haul her up beside him.

They dropped over to the other side. Erson paused, letting Ilma catch her breath.

"We'll cut along the wall here to where it curves around past that big gateway. Then back over. Once we

get going up those stairs they'll never catch us."

Never before had he felt such panic. Fear he had known before, but not this wild unreasoning fear. Fear of what, he didn't know. Nothing his fists could batter down, nothing he could fight, something he could only run from.

They had dropped facing the wall and had remained so for the moment it took to get their balance. Now, as they turned, they saw for the first time what grew in the fields of Shiru.

The earth had been raised at intervals into mounds, perhaps a hundred of them, regularly spaced and only about two feet high. And out of the mounds the horror crop grew.

Not grain, not fruit, not flowers to sway in the moonlight. But *men!*

Men were what the women of Shiru planted, men were what they reaped. A freshly turned mound recalled to Erson the small, brown skinned man and the women who had carried him through that door.

Here he had been sown, and here he would grow. As these others were growing. From this mound close by the top of a head protruded, above another a face was already visible.

Some to the throat, others as far as the knees, the thighs, the hips. One to the shoulders. And even one near the center of the field with his feet already clear, rigid, unseeing, needing only the breath of life to make him live.

Ilma's mouth opened to scream. Erson clapped a hand over it, a hand that shook with palsy. They had to run, to *run*.

But it was too late. Ahead of them the great door was swinging open. Through it came the women of Shiru.

SLOWLY THE procession moved, a soft chant rising. Toward that stalk of human corn in the center of

the field, away from the mound behind which Erson and the girl lay trembling.

The chant was louder now, they were almost there. Mala reached out her hands and touched the shoulders, moved the rigid figure, broke it free from the earth.

A high scream soared from its throat. This was the moment of birth, and birth was painful. The eyes opened. He lived!

He began to run, not as a man might run in fear but as one in whom an instinct is born for a certain ceremony. This was the ceremony, then. He ran slowly, his movements flowing and graceful, and three of the women came after him.

A mock chase, symbol of a forgotten reality. It did not last long.

They had him, they were bearing him to earth. Their hair swirled about his face, their faces were pressed close about his throat.

He broke free and was up again, the trickles of blood on his throat dark in the moonlight. Once more they bore him down in their ghastly embrace. He made no more resistance. His hands fondled them and from his lips there came the laughter of Shiru.

They had their fill and rose again and he came with them, his movements less graceful now, his skin like wax in the moonlight. The ceremony was done; he was of Shiru now.

Ilma couldn't help herself, she was violently sick. Unable to avert her eyes from the horror they witnessed, she was also unable to control the nausea that followed.

A few moments later it wouldn't have mattered. The procession would have wound its way back through the gate.

But now the sounds she made brought disaster. The procession halted, turned toward the place where

the two were hidden in the shadow of the wall.

"This is it," Erson said. They hadn't a chance of remaining unseen.

MALA'S EYES were wide with incredulity. Erson could not be here. It was impossible. And yet here he was, and the girl beside him.

"*You!*" Mala's eyes stabbed at Ilma. "*You!*"

Priestess of Shiru, priestess of vampireism, of the foulest demoniac worship, she was poised to rend, to destroy this warm blooded woman. Transfixed, Ilma's only gesture of defense was unthinking, sprung from her unconscious. Her finger moved over her breast in the sign of the Cross.

Mala's laugh was scornful.

"Shiru was ancient when your god was yet unborn. Do you think your Cross could harm us? Not your gods, but such as *you* broke Shiru's rule and forced us back until only buried here were we safe from your kind."

All the accumulated venom of ages was in her voice. All the hatred of eons was in her words.

"Now die!"

But Erson was too quick. He swung Ilma behind him, close to the wall. He had a hunch that whatever Mala might want to do to the girl, she would want him unharmed.

His hunch was right. The priestess hesitated, her hand still raised in a gesture to the men gathered with the rest of the women.

"Why should you protect her? Let her die. She means nothing to you. Be one with Shiru."

"No, thanks," Erson grunted.

"You forget. Do you remember what it was to lie in my arms? How long we waited for such men as you! How long we wasted on the meager substance of the puny tribes around us in this hidden valley!

"For you there is ecstasy never ending. Not death, but always renewal and rebirth."

So this was what the gruesome harvest meant. When men had been drained beyond their powers of recovery, when the women of Shiru had taken from them the last of their strength and vitality, they were returned to this accursed earth to be somehow restored.

Mala's body was sculptured white marble, a magnet that drew Erson, evoking again the moments they had spent on the divan. Forever, she said.

But that was not life eternal; it was living death. Somewhere Mattick had found the strength to reject Shiru once. With the feel of Ilma's body close behind him, Erson could reject it again and again.

"No, thanks," he said again.

Mala smiled, still believing in her power to sway him. "When she is gone you will feel differently."

She waved her hand and four of the men came on, machinelike, menacing. Erson braced himself, his eyes narrowed. At least he had his back protected, he thought.

Then they were at him in a rush, trying to overwhelm him by sheer weight. Erson speared one with a long jab that rocked him back on his heels.

The rest were too close to pick off. Erson got his head down and pistoned his fists, every bit of the power of his legs, his shoulders, his arms going into each blow.

A man crumpled, his chest crushed. Another was down. Erson got his head up again. He kicked scientifically and a third one doubled over.

But there was no respite. More of them came at him, too many to handle with a dozen fists. They poured over him, sending him to his knees under their cold bodies.

His head went back, striking against the wall. For a moment he was dazed,

without will to resist.

A soft body was against his, long hair as fine as spider silk brushing against his face. Mala! Her eyes bored into his, drugging him, lulling him. Her lips were at his throat.

Then Ilma screamed, a sound as sharp as the teeth that sought his vein.

It was enough. Erson was struggling again, cursing this thing that clung to him, flinging her aside.

He hadn't hurt her; perhaps nothing could hurt her. But on Mala's face as she came erect again was an expression of distaste. Her lips worked as though she had eaten something bitter.

She spat, shuddering, and the spit-
tle was mingled with blood. Again she spat.

"It is enough," she said. "Against your will, Shiru will not hold you, *cannot* hold you."

Her eyes bored into Erson's. "But remember, you will return! And you may not return alone. Who leaves Shiru must bring another when he comes back."

HIGH NOON, and the sun blazed down into the valley of Shiru. Ahead of Erson and the girl and above them the stairs climbed endlessly, almost perpendicularly, until their width became a tiny thread.

It was true. Shiru would not keep them against their will. Erson rubbed the small wound on his throat and thought he knew why.

In anger, in battle, a man's chemistry changed. Glands pumped substances into the blood, speeding the clotting time. Adrenalin to speed the heart.

Not a potable mixture, perhaps, for these women of Shiru. They preferred their victims quiescent. Erson remembered the drink Mala had given him to prepare him for her.

But all that was past. Beside him

now Ilma stood, looking upward with him. In a moment they would start the climb, and both realized that a single slip could mean death.

"Are you ready?" Mala asked. Erson nodded.

"Here." She held out a cane, a straight black stick with a knob at one end, perhaps the one Mattick had carried.

"I'll do without it," Erson told her.

"No. Without it you die. And if you die you are lost to Shiru."

So this was the condition on which they could leave; the security, in some way Erson couldn't comprehend, for his return. And yet Mala's words had the ring of sincerity.

Still he shook his head. She nodded. "Very well. But try two steps first, one foot on each."

Nothing to lose, Erson thought. He walked the few feet to the foot of the stairs, lifted his right foot to the bottom step. He raised his left foot, brought it down.

Living fire ran through him, pain so intense it contorted his body and brought a moan to his twisted lips. He fell back. The pain was gone.

Now he knew what Mala had meant. This black staircase must be climbed one step at a time, one foot always in the air. To set both down at once completed some infernal circuit. And a fall from any height was certain death.

For himself he might have tried it, even knowing that neither his own strength nor any man's was equal to the task. But not with Ilma beside him.

He reached for the cane, grasped the knob firmly. "Keep your hand on my shoulder," he said to the girl.

ONE STEP, and then another. And another and another and another. And always another before them until Erson lost count.

He had the sense of pace, the ability to keep himself going at a steady rate. Even so, he began to tire. How far he had climbed he didn't know. The sun was blazing hot, his thigh muscles knotted painfully each time they lifted his weight.

So far he had taken them one at a time. Now he slipped, faltered. Beside him Ilma let out a cry of fear. Erson used the cane for the first time to steady himself.

A shock ran up his arm. Not bad enough to hurt, just enough to bring him wider awake.

"I can't go on," Ilma moaned. "I just can't."

Erson bent, still leaning on the cane, and with his other hand swung her around and dropped her across his shoulder.

After that he used the cane at each step. He was beyond counting, beyond thinking, even. He knew only that he had to keep climbing, step by step. And each step was marked by a spasm in his hand and arm.

He was not even aware of it when the stairs ended. His feet still lifted and fell, rose and came down.

The blaze of sun was gone, behind him, beyond the two pillars of stone that were the teeth of Shiru. There was no more upward motion, no forward motion.

Only Erson's feet continued to move. And then he could move them no longer. He felt himself falling, falling endlessly.

There was only the green dampness of the jungle around him when he woke. Peering upward through the screen of foliage he could see dimly the soaring peaks beyond.

Except for the girl beside him and the cane he clutched it might have been a dream. He tried to throw the cane aside. He could not.

He beat it against the earth, frantically smashed it against trees, twist-

ed it, turned it. His right hand remained curled about it in a grip that refused to be broken.

At last Erson gave it up. That could wait. Now they had to get moving. Where, in which direction, he didn't know. But somewhere.

And Ilma didn't look well. All the noise he'd made hadn't roused her. As he bent over her now he saw how pale she was, how white her skin.

He shook her, knowing it was no use. This was no sleep, this was coma.

To move her might mean death. But to leave her here made death a certainty. Somewhere, somehow, he would carry her to help.

After that it was a dream world Erson lived in, a world of green nightmare. He knew only that he moved forward, always with the girl lying limp across his shoulder.

When fatigue overcame him he lay her down and dropped beside her. And sometimes, when he glimpsed a fruit which seemed edible, he paused to pick it and squeeze its juice into her mouth before eating the pulp himself.

There were swamps, rivers, obstacles after obstacles. Somehow Erson surmounted them. Somehow he kept moving, knowing that if he stopped she would die.

How far he travelled he never knew, not knowing from where he had started. It seemed that he had been on this trek forever.

And then one day it ended. Erson came out of the jungle onto a flat stretch where the earth was furrowed, where the hand of man had imposed order on growing things.

But until the men were clustered around him, speaking to him, Erson was not even aware of this. Then he looked up dully. There was a man in white ducks, a man who reached out to take the burden from Erson's shoulder.

AFTERWARD there was a soft bed and something warm and stimulating to drink. And another man in white ducks who felt his pulse and listened to his heart and smiled and said in a Spanish accent, "He will live. A good rest and he will be better than you and I."

"What about the girl?" This was the first man.

Erson sat up, pushing his covers off. "What about her? How is she?"

"Lie back," the doctor commanded, and seeing his command was useless, went on, "I don't know. A coma, yes. But no sign of injury. Perhaps jungle fever of some sort. How long has she been like this? One day? Two days?"

Erson shook his head. Days, weeks, perhaps months.

"But that is impossible." Then, realizing it might not be impossible, the doctor shrugged. "We will see."

In the end he saw no more than at first. He did his best, used whatever drugs he thought might help. None of them helped at all; Ilma remained as she was.

A coma, perhaps. *Si*. Some sort of catatonic stupor, some kind of suspended animation, some form of catalepsy. All possibilities. *Si*. But to say anything definite was not possible.

However, there was a doctor in Rio. Rio was a big city. There were specialists. If she could be taken there perhaps there might be hope.

"How soon can we get her there?" Erson demanded.

"A few hours, in an ambulance. But you are not yet in good shape to travel."

Erson reached out with his left hand and gathered the doctor's white coat together and lifted him from the floor, then set him gently back again. "Am I in shape to travel?"

"I may have been wrong," the doctor murmured.

Their host interjected a question.

"What about money? It may take a good deal, you know."

"I've got enough," Erson told him.

In his pocket there was still the stone Mattick had given him. And another besides. More than enough.

WHILE THEY prepared Ilma for the necessary tests, Erson found a jewelry store, large enough and old enough to be reputable. A few minutes later the emerald lay on a table between him and a man with a glass screwed in his eye.

"How much?" Erson demanded. "One price."

The price was right, more than he had been offered in New Orleans. It was more money than Erson ever dreamed of owning.

And yet it could buy nothing for Ilma. A week later she was still the same, a month later no better.

Everything had been tried, the doctors assured Erson. Everything. Of course there was always the chance that others might do more. Perhaps in the United States. In San Francisco there was a doctor—.

Erson saw the doctor in San Francisco. The doctor could do nothing for Ilma. It was beyond his ken. It was possible, however—.

So Erson found himself now on a different journey, through another sort of jungle. This jungle had white walls and smelled strongly of antiseptic and had people dressed in white and rubber wheeled carts that rolled noiselessly through the halls.

Like the jungle it had a sameness, an endless quality that bred in him a curious kind of apathy. The same questions, the same answers, the same still figure lying beneath the white sheet.

Occasionally a question about himself, about the cane. The doctors were observant.

Erson let them prod him, stick

needles in his arm, in his forearm, in his fingers. There was nothing wrong with his hand. He simply could not open it.

One doctor suggested cutting down the cane. It seemed a good idea. Erson tried it. He stopped trying after the fifth saw blade broke without producing a nick.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered any more. And that was a strange thing.

He was in New York, a figure of a man that women turned to look at. With all the money a man ever needed. And nothing to buy, nothing he wanted.

Except one thing!

The longing grew on him bit by bit, fragment by fragment. Part of it came with a woman who passed him and was gone. Part of it came with a voice overheard. Some of it came to him as he walked through Central Park on a moonlit night.

At first Erson was aware only of a vague longing. And then, as it grew slowly, piece by piece, he knew what he wanted.

He wanted to go back to Shiru!

FOR A WHILE Erson fought it, or tried to fight it. But the battle was lost before it was begun. He stood beside Ilma on her hospital bed and looked down at her. She was no more to him than a wax figure.

In Shiru was the reality. This was the dream. And he could no longer live in a dream. He had to go back.

Mala had been right. If he went he would return. He had left some part of himself there. Without it he would never be whole again. And in Mala's arms he would find it.

But there was more to it than that. He remembered only dimly, at first, but he remembered.

Those who left Shiru did not return alone. Each must bring another like

him. That was the penalty for leaving, the price of return.

So he must find someone, someone who would please Shiru. And not soon, but quickly. Now!

The urgency was in Erson now. As he walked the streets he scanned the crowds. Strange how puny the men seemed, how lacking in the strength and vitality Shiru needed.

Desperately now, Erson searched. And at last he found the man he sought.

In a bar, as Mattick had found him. This man towered over those around him. His shoulders were wide and square and he moved with the quickness of the trained athlete. He was alone.

Erson slid in beside him. The conversation began as most do. A remark about the drinks, about the weather. As Mattick had begun the conversation with him.

And as Mattick had done with him, Erson sized this man up. A big man, not completely happy. But not a man to be afraid.

It was time for Erson to start his play. "You could make it," he said. "Make what?" the man asked.

"Shiru." A pause while the other looked puzzled. Then, "Where can I talk to you alone?"

Only after they had started for the man's office did Erson feel a qualm. He wanted to do this, and yet he didn't want to do it.

His name was Stone and he had an office in a building that towered up from the bank of the Hudson. And as they rode up in the elevator Erson knew that now was the time to say, "Forget it."

But he couldn't make himself say the words. It was strange that a thing he wanted so badly to do he also wanted not to do. But it was so.

And in the end he knew he would do it. As they went into Stone's office

Erson dug into his pocket for the green jewel. The call of Shiru was too strong....

NOW THE laughter was in Erson's ears. He sat in this office and yet he saw only Shiru, saw it as he had first seen it, with the women gathered at the base of the idol and the laughter rising over them.

The jewel alone hadn't won Stone. But it had held his interest. And the words were doing the rest.

"Three thousand steps to Shiru," Erson said again.

For an instant he prayed that Stone would refuse. And then the image of Shiru blotted out the prayer, the laughter rose higher.

Now the questions would come. "What is Shiru?"

"A place," Erson said. "A people, a way of life."

He saw it all as he said it, saw them at the foot of the stairway to Shiru. Saw Mala's face clearly, smiling at him. Saw her arms held out to bring him close to her white body.

"And you want me to go there with you?" Stone asked.

"Yes."

It was as if he were there already, so clearly could he see Mala. So clearly could he see it all.

"All right. I'll go," Stone was saying.

Erson hardly heard him, so loud had the laughter become. It came from inside him too, bubbling to his lips, echoing the sound in his ears.

A paper fluttered on the desk. "Damn wind," Stone said, and got up and went to the window.

Erson shuddered. There was something between him and Mala now, blotting her out. Another woman, a woman whose arms were also out to him, whose body also called to him. Ilma!

With a sudden wrench, Erson was

out of his chair. He flung himself forward, past Stone, just as the huge window slammed down. With sickening force it hit Erson's outstretched hand.

Bones crunched like match sticks as the hand was crushed. But there was no immediate pain. Only a look of joy on Erson's face.

Far below a slender object plummeted toward the river. The cane was gone! He was free!

The laughter of Shiru was no laughter now. The smile was gone from Mala's face. The scene was fading now, fading so quickly that Erson couldn't be sure whether he saw it or not. But it seemed to him that Shiru toppled.

Then Stone was yanking up the window again, wincing at the sight of Erson's hand, asking him what the devil he was trying to do.

"Never mind," Erson laughed. "Just keep that thing on your desk and forget you ever met me."

Then he was out of the office and running for the elevator, wrapping his broken and bleeding hand in his handkerchief, in his shirt.

He flung himself into a cab, shouted the name and address of the hospital he wanted. And grinned down at the blood that dripped onto the cab's floor as they sped across the city.

No time to worry about that now. First he had to see Ilma. Afterward he'd have the hand attended to.

But first, even if she couldn't hear him, he had to tell Ilma he loved her. And only her. That was all that mattered now.

Like a madman he ran through the hospital corridors. Good thing she had a private room. He didn't have to worry about visiting hours.

And then, at the door of her room, his heart froze. There were voices inside, the sound of activity. A nurse came bustling out, her face serious.

What if he had saved himself, but killed her? Her life had hung by a thread. What if he had cut it?

There were doctors about the bed so he could not see. He spun one of them around.

"What is it?" Erson demanded. "What's the matter?"

"She woke up," the doctor said. "Just like that."

He was going on but Erson wasn't listening. He was shoving them all aside. She was awake, all right. Not much more than that, but her eyes were open.

She saw him. A faint frown appeared on her brow, and then a faint-

or smile. She recognized him!

"Hello," she said weakly.

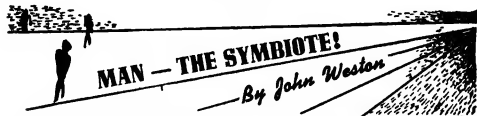
"Hello." Erson's voice was husky. "Remember me?"

"You...you're Erson. You saved me from the savages." Her voice drifted off, came back again. "But after that...something else. I must have dreamed it...something horrible."

"You dreamed it," Erson told her. "You only dreamed it."

He put his good arm around her and held her close and watched her go back to sleep, this time peacefully.

THE END



ORDINARILY, science fiction visualizes an optimistic future, a future in which Man dwells in harmony with his environment and his machines. Want has been conquered, war abolished, and science reigns supreme. Even women have become logical!

But Norbert Wiener's beautiful essays on cybernetics and the ever-increasing importance of automatic machines and robots in our culture, cast an ominous note over the whole theme, for the relationship between Man and his machines is slowly changing, changing to the point where the machine has become an almost human organism, capable of meeting Man on common ground. The displacement of muscle by the steam engine and recently the electric motor, followed by the entry of "thinking" calculating machines into the picture—point a dreadful moral.

Scientists turn to biology to describe the relationship between organisms. "Symbiosis" is the term biologists use to classify a relationship between two dissimilar organisms. It includes the familiar examples of parasitism we note, in say, the lamprey eel and fresh-water fish. But Man is also engaging in a symbiotic relationship with his machines. As they grow ever greater in complexity, Man becomes more and more of a parasite. The machine assumes increasing importance and, though it was originally designed merely as an adjunct to hu-

man faculties, it has over-reached itself to the point where men have become simply attendants—and then—parasites upon the machine. Perhaps this is a distortion; that stage hasn't yet been reached but, slowly and certainly, it is coming.

This "antagonistic symbiosis," as the biologist would call it, may be only temporary; in fact, it had better be only temporary, for sooner or later the level at which a machine is said to "think" may be lowered—the genuine thinking machine is very close. Fortunately the problem is recognized and that's half the battle. Even pessimistic Wiener sees an eventual symbiosis of the mutual assistance variety. On the predication that the machine is Man's tool and good right arm, the glowing optimistic super-civilization that could be, very likely will be.

Nevertheless, there must always be an awareness of the fact that Man has built his machine better than he suspected and that the relationship between Man and machine is no longer quite that of slave and master but rather that of Machine and symbiote, a radically different picture. The simple pastoral world of our predecessors may have been more desirable—that's doubtful—but the fact remains that the machine is here to stay whether for good or bad. It will be the former if Man thinks wisely; it may be the latter if Man loses his head!

YOU TAKE THE HIGH ROAD

By Stephen Marlowe



"Come over tomorrow night," the Murkie invited pleasantly as he broke his friend's arm |



It was a funny world, Chambers found. All you had to do was beat them up, and the Murkies were your friends for life . . .

CHAMBERS came away from the port in a hurry. "Hey, Jenks," he cried. "Come here and look at this."

Jenks, the captain of the *Sirius Sue*, was a big man and a heavy man and he did not move fast. Peterson, the astrogator, got there first, gaunt-cheeked and grim. "You see him, Doug?"

Chambers shook his head. "I don't know. But I see some of those damned Murkies, that's what I see. Take a look for yourself."

The *Sirius Sue* rested on its side in a field of what could have been scrub grass, except for its purple color. Half a dozen of the Murkies had come up in the gathering darkness, and now they prowled about outside the little

freighter.

Jenks was puffing when he reached the port. "What are they carrying? Look—"

It could have been Smith, bulky, two arms, two legs. But it seemed too limp, and on closer inspection it turned out to be Smith's spacesuit.

Chambers cursed once and then ran for the airlock, gripping a blaster tight in his hand. "They've killed him," he said.

This time, for all his great size, Jenks moved rapidly. He reached the door ahead of Chambers and he stood there with his hands raised. "Hold it, Doug. You're not going outside. Not like that, not with your gun."

"They killed him—"

"Maybe yes, maybe no. I don't know. But there are only three of us, or four if you count Smith. There's a whole planet of Murkies, and if you think you're jumping out there with a gun, you're crazy. They're riled enough now, and you're not going to rile them more, not while I'm still captain of this ship. Sit down and take it easy, Doug."

Chambers growled something under his breath and holstered his blaster. Across the room, Peterson pointed through the thick glass of the port. "They're going away," he said.

It was true. Dancing and jumping weirdly in the half light, the Murkies were leaving the field of purple scrub grass. Some of them paused to heave big rocks at the hull of the *Sirius Sue*, and those that struck clanged resoundingly throughout the length of the little ship, grating against the nerves of the three men within it.

After a time Jenks said: "You can go outside now if you want to, Doug. They left the spacesuit."

It was nothing but a spacesuit. Silently, Chambers picked it up and returned to the ship. The funny part of it was that Smith had not even needed

his suit outside. The air was close enough to Earth norm to keep them alive, and although cool, the temperature was well above the freezing point of water. It almost could have been a pleasant little globe upon which to be stranded for a few days—except for the Murkies.

"SMITH'S GONE," Peterson said. "That leaves three of us. What next?"

"We don't know for sure that he is gone." This was Jenks. "But we'll have to assume that to be true."

Smith had a wife and three kids on one of the Jovian moons back in Sol System.

"How will we tell his family?" Peterson growled.

"Hold your horses," Chambers told him. "Who said we'd get back to Sol System to get the chance? These Murkies seem to have other ideas."

"We'll have to try again," Jenks said.

Peterson was indignant. "You mean, send someone else out there?"

The captain nodded. "We'll have to. We need steel, that's all there is to it. A meteor hits us, we get a hole big enough to drive a ground car through, so we need steel to repair it."

"All right," Peterson said, "you go out there and ask them for it."

"You're acting like a child. We'll draw lots like we did the last time."

The last time Smith had received the short straw and, smiling, he had gone out to bargain with the Murkies for steel. They returned his spacesuit a day later, with the coming of darkness. Each day they came to the *Sirius Sue* with the coming of darkness, just after the dull red globe of Antares had set on the near horizon, and that is why Chambers had first dubbed them "murkies".

The straws really were pipe cleaners from Peterson's corn cob, and Jenks

had broken one of the three short. Now he held them in his big hand, and Chambers took one, palming it and keeping his fist closed. Peterson followed suit, and then they opened their hands.

"God, it's me. I got the short one," Peterson said.

Jenks looked at him. "Tomorrow morning will be soon enough."

Chambers frowned. "It isn't right, Jenks. Peterson, you're scared, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Yeah, of course I'm scared—"

"He shouldn't go, captain. I'll go instead...."

"No you won't. You're the last one I'd want out there, Doug. You'd go with your blaster ready and the Murkies would come swarming down here and then none of us would get off this planet. Let's just leave it to chance, the way we did."

Outside, it was dark. In a while, Peterson opened some cans and they ate in silence. Chambers lit a cigarette and Jenks settled back with his pipe, but Peterson paced back and forth in the little room. "Funny," he said. "If we only knew what they had against us." It was a good question. They had been on the planet for three days, and the very first evening the Murkies had come to throw their stones.

"Simple," Jenks told him. "They just don't like strangers. We humans are gregarious. We humans are that way, both among ourselves and among the outworlders. Not the Murkies. They don't like strangers. Maybe if you're diplomatic tomorrow, Peterson—"

"I'll try, captain. Say, you fellows see to it that my pension goes to my family in Io City, will you?"

Chambers put out his cigarette. "I say we're not going about this thing right, Jenks. There's always an explanation for behavior—animal, hu-

man, outworld. It's the same thing, there's an explanation. We have to find it. If we studied these Murkies instead of going right up to them and asking for what we want, we might find it. Why do they act this way? Why do they hate us?"

"Uh-uh, Doug. We tried to talk with them that first day, remember?"

"Doug remembers," Peterson said. "How could he forget?"

The telepath scanner had shown nothing. The thoughts had come through as words, but it had been gibberish. "That proves nothing," Chambers said. "They don't think the way we do. All the the more reason to expect unusual behavior, to study it, to see what causes it, to act accordingly. What do you think, Pete?"

"I don't know. How should I know? Jenk's running this show: I'm only an astrogator. I'll go tomorrow...."

HE LEFT in the morning, soon after Antares' dull swollen globe had marched up over the horizon. He tried to smile as he went, wearing his spacesuit to equalize the light gravity to Earth norm, but it looked more like a grimace. He had with him jewelry and silks from the *Sirius Sue's* cargo, and he was to trade this for the precious steel.

The Murkies came at dusk, a dozen of them this time. They were reptilian forms, not unlike giant wraith-thin frogs which walked upright. They came in their weird dance, jostling one another, circling, leaping up and down, each one trying to be the first to reach the ship. This time they came closer and stones pounded against the hull of the *Sirius Sue* for almost an hour.

Chambers knew it was hopeless, but he tuned in the scanner. He heard: "Hello, hello, hello! Greetings to you, friends from the sky. We strike you with stones and we hope you die. Hello, hello, hello!"

Jenks reached out and flicked the switch to the off position. "Bah!" he said. "Don't bother with it, Doug. They're nuts."

"I don't know...."

Slowly, the Murkies danced away from the ship, and Jenks stood up. "I have an idea."

"A pat on the back for you, Captain. You had one day before yesterday, and we got Smith's empty suit back. Today, will they leave us Peterson's?"

"I'll take care of this myself, Doug. Just an idea...."

He went to the lock and he opened it. Chambers stood at the port and watched the big man step outside. He must have called out, because some of the Murkies turned to face him, and in a moment they were leaping back towards the ship. Jenks spread his hands eloquently enough in the universal sign for peace, but the stones began to clatter against the hull again.

Jenks whirled back and ran for the port, but one of the rocks struck his shoulder and he stumbled and fell. The Murkies came on, striking one another in their efforts to reach the fallen man first.

Chambers swore and ran to the lock. He opened it and for a moment he heard the weird calls of the Murkies. Then he had reached Jenks and he was aware of the flying stones all about him. He tugged at the big man's shoulders and, in the light gravity, he lifted him and carried him like a baby back to the ship. Then he slammed and bolted the lock, and it was several moments before the fusillade came to an end, before the Murkies retired for the evening.

A big bandage covered Jenk's right shoulder, and a frown covered his face. "I thought if we got friendly right here at the ship, it might be different. We could show them exactly what we wanted—"

"Yeah. You *thought*. Now you're flat on your back and I'll do the thinking. See that?"

Another spacesuit lay on the floor near Smith's. "That's Peterson's," Chambers continued. "They brought it back. Smith and now Peterson—"

"What do you want me to do? I tried...."

"Okay. Okay. Now it's up to me. It'll take a few days before you can move that shoulder, captain, and if I die, I want to do it my way."

"Listen, I'm giving orders. You know what Ordinance says—"

"I know. It says that in cases of emergency on an unknown planet, only one man is to go out at a time. He's to reach the nearest center of habitation on a populated planet and request—keeping the dictates of the outworld ethic clearly in mind—and request what's needed. Nuts!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean different culture, different problems, different reaction. You know what you can do with Ordinance and the outworld ethic. When you're in Rome, Jenks—"

"What are you going to do?"

"Well, it takes a minimum of two to pilot a ship. Not less, it takes two men. I'm not going out there like Smith and Peterson, that's a cinch. You'd get *my* spacesuit back here by nightfall, and that would be the end of it. Even if you could patch up that hole in the ceiling, which you couldn't—not without steel from the Murkies—you'd never get away from here. One man can't run a ship, Jenks; so now neither one of us is expendable. We're twice as precious as gold, each one of us."

"So what?"

"So this. I'm not going out there to the Murkies with my arms spread wide, not this boy."

"You go with a gun and they'll kill you just as quick."

"Sure, I know, but I'll take one anyway. It gets to be habit, Jenks—you carry one for so long, you feel lost without it. But I'm going as a student."

"A what?"

"A student. You heard me. I'll be a student of extra-terrestrial anthropology. I'm not going to do a thing with those Murkies—until I find out what they are. Then maybe I can do something that can help us. Okay?"

"Okay. What can I say? I'll be on my back for a few days, so there's no drawing straws this time. A student! You don't mind if I think you're crazy, Doug?"

Chambers smiled. "Go ahead, if it'll help to pass the time."

ANTARES was a big bloodshot red eye halfway up in the morning sky when Chambers set out. He had a blaster in his belt and on the other side he carried a hand-scanner. You couldn't be a student of extra-terrestrial anthropology without a student's tools. He had used a scanner on the Murkies before and it had been worse than useless: but he could only try again.

The red glow of Antares cast a somber light on everything about him, but through it Chambers saw a pleasant world. There were large plants and small ones, mostly reds and purples with broad flat leaves of a glossy texture. Little animal-things scurried out of sight every now and then before he really had a chance to see them, but of bigger forms of active life there was no indication. Nothing but the Murkies. Ahead of him a few miles was their city: this he knew because he had seen it from the air before the crippled *Sirius Sue* had plummeted down upon the planet.

It was a crazy city, but they had landed near it because of Interstellar Ordinance. As far as they could see

from the air, it was the only city on the planet, yet it seemed to be torn by strife. They had swooped low over its buildings, and not one of them seemed to be completely intact. Most were crumbling and broken, not from age or decay: the stone and the metal and the glass were too new for that.

Then the city was in a state of ruin from warfare. That much, at least, was obvious. Yet of another city they had seen nothing, and now Chambers had not even been able to detect signs of other animal life large enough to be of any consequence. Were the Murkies, then, fighting an interstellar war? This hardly seemed likely, because the crew of the *Sirius Sue* had discovered their planet only a few days ago. Jenks had checked the charts and it was unmentioned, unknown—a tiny speck too far off the star trails to be detected except by the sort of accident which brought down the *Sirius Sue*.

Chambers shrugged. Everything was purest conjecture until he actually had a chance to see the Murkies at first hand. He bounded away towards the horizon, held in check by gravity only one-third as strong as Earth's, and in spite of Smith, in spite of Peterson, in spite of the Murkies, he found himself whistling. This could be such a pleasant little world. Besides, he was not altogether sure that Smith and Peterson were dead. He could not be sure of anything....

THE MURKIES stood in a little clearing where the vegetation was not so high, and they were fighting. Chambers came upon them quite suddenly and he crouched low in the shrubbery to watch. They fought like two giant reptiles, hissing and snapping at each other, and the blood which flowed was green.

Presently one of them backed away and took a little basket out of a pouch on his waist. He sat down and

opened it, and the other joined him. Soon they took out two little jars and began to eat whatever was within them. For a few moments they sat eating, and then, in reptilian fashion, two long forked tongues protruded to clean their lips. They had lousy table manners.

In a moment, they were fighting again. They carefully packed away the remains of their lunch—it seemed for all the world like a picnic to Chambers—and then they were locked together again, tooth and nail. He left them that way, still fighting in their clearing, the only indications of hostility in a tranquil environment.

The more he bounded over the peaceful terrain, the more Chambers liked the world. After a time you got used to the odd diffusion of red, and everything else seemed in quiet harmony. A colorful, harmless world, except for the Murkies.

Suddenly Chambers found himself regretting the fact that he had not used his scanner on the battling Murkies. He could not tell, of course, what it would have shown him, but at any rate he'd get another chance when he reached the city. Their jabbering, then, would have nothing to do with the ship from the sky, and it might make more sense. It might, and then again it might not.

It didn't, not at first. Antares was still high in the sky when he reached the outskirts of the ruined city, and he kept carefully within the taller clumps of grasses. He could see the Murkies everywhere, and almost universally they were fighting. They seemed to join battle and to quit it on the slightest provocation, even with no provocation at all. Once Chambers crept close to one of the melees, to a wild free-for-all which pitted half a dozen of the giant reptiles one against the other, without order, without pattern, without plan.

Chambers tuned in his scanner. The machine had its limitations: it could only translate concepts which were meaningful to both cultures. He listened: "If it's nice tomorrow, we can destroy Gurru's house... Damn, that hurt! Step on my callous, will you?"

"No. Gurru is away on vacation. He'd want to get in on the fun himself.... Careful, careful. I'll break your neck—"

"The Administration plans mass destruction on Dnipotok Day. Can you imagine? Three hundred houses in one shindig! Get the hell off my callous! I'll rip out your bloated tongue, you oaf—"

"Hey, cut it out, you guys. They're taking down the Government Building today. You want to watch, don't you? Leave go of my arm, or—"

"Nuts! I haven't been hurt all afternoon. Bunch of weaklings, that's what you are.... Ouch!"

The particular Murky which mouthed that last bit must have been sorry. In a moment, the other five had united against him and they were pounding his head into the mud and he kept on threatening to tear out their tongues, although Chambers knew it would be quite impossible for the reptile in question to do anything of the kind at the moment.

This was madness, this was getting him nowhere, and in a moment he shut off his scanner and proceeded on his way around the periphery of the city. He chuckled softly to himself. So he wanted to be a student of anthropology, to understand before he acted. A trained anthropologist whose specialty was intelligent reptile life could spend twenty years here and come away with a lot of questions.

To his left was the tranquil countryside, and to his right the city was in ruins. It had not been deserted: It was a crowded and bustling metro-

polis, but most of the buildings were at least in partial states of destruction. Some were being torn down, and others, brand new and glistening, had raised their proud spires only partially, were obviously being constructed. But paradoxically, most of these had been gutted by some form of bombardment, so that although Chambers was convinced the Murkies were not at war with anyone, that clearly seemed to be the case.

He walked a bit further and he came to another struggling knot of the reptiles. He smiled wryly and he told himself that he was a fool, but he tuned in his scanner again. After all, there was nothing else he could do.

At first he heard nothing: these particular Murkies seemed too intent upon their struggles to mouth anything beyond groans, grunts and hisses, but presently one of them said: "By Dnipotok Day, I'm bored. There just isn't a damned thing to do."

"That's pretty insulting, Runx. I hurt you three times this morning, and I can do it again this afternoon, you weak, no good—"

"Enough! I didn't want to, but you forced me. I must rip out your tongue, Ow!"

"Bored, eh? Ingrate! Hey, fellows, Runx is bored."

Everyone ganged up on the green and white striped Murky which was Runx.

It hit Chambers so suddenly that it left him feeling giddy. He stood there for a moment and he laughed. Everything became clear all at once. The pieces of the puzzle fit together where they would not fit together before, thanks to Runx. Runx was bored—and that did it. On Earth some day he would feel like building a shrine to Runx. . . .

He stood there laughing, and he was not aware of the noise he made. Soon a few of the Murkies turned to

him. One said: "Ooo. Another one of our sky-friends. Hit him, hit him!"

They advanced, and Chambers smiled. He knew he would have no trouble handling a few of them at a time—as long as they did not press down upon him in overwhelming numbers, he was all right. His muscles were accustomed to a pull of gravity three times as strong as what they felt now, so he would be a veritable superman.

The first Murky reached him and Chambers grinned. All at once, the whole situation had become ludicrous to him—provided he was right. All the Murkies in the area were converging on him. . . .

HE GRABBED the first one about the shoulders and swung the ridiculously light body into the air. He whirled it once over his head and he cried: "Hello from the men of the sky!" Then he hurled the body away from him, into the vanguard of those advancing.

The scanner, of course, worked both ways. "Hello yourself, friend. What gives with your companions?" one of the Murkies demanded. "Hostile creatures, damned anti-social, that's what. We're keeping them around just to see, but so far they've been unfriendly as hell. Are they sick? Ouch!"

Chambers lifted this particular Murky high over his head, whirling him in the air until he screamed, "Terrific, terrific! Put me down or I'll rip off your stupid thin skin!"

"Bring my friends to me, misshapen toad!"

"Ugly livid white mammal, giant mammal; I'll kill you, that's what I'll do. You really want those morons?"

"You bet your life I want them!" Chambers hurled this Murky away from him also and he turned over three times before he came to rest in the mud.

After a time he sat up and he called to Chambers: "You mean you really want those morons? Really?"

"Yeah," Chambers said wearily. He was throwing around more of the Murkies than he could count. "I want them, fast. And I also want some steel. Plenty of steel. You have it?"

"Have it? Imbecile!"

"I asked you a question, idiotic toad." Chambers threw another Murky after the one he was addressing.

"Of course we have it, ugliness. How much do you need?"

"Plenty," Chambers said, laughing. "Hurry up and bring it, or I'll break you in half."

"Would you, would you? Really? Ouch! Okay, I'll bring it, and your friends, though Dnipotok knows why you want those hostile creatures..."

A weird procession made its way back from the city towards the injured *Sirius Sue*. Smith and Peterson walked unmolested in a group of the Murkies, the members of which constantly fought with one another. Up ahead, another group—also fighting—wheeled some machinery which was almost solid steel and which could be melted down and recast to fit the *Sirius Sue*'s hull perfectly. And still further ahead, Chambers walked with half a dozen of the Murkies, fighting with them and throwing them around all the way.

THE *SIRIUS SUE* purred off into space, its engines humming sweetly.

"I don't understand," said Peterson.

Jenks growled, "Just be glad you're not dead."

"Dead?" Smith demanded. "They never tried to kill us. Didn't lay a finger on us, except to capture us. Then, after that, they just didn't let us go, that's all. But they fed us and they didn't hurt us. I don't get it."

"They'd have kept you there for-

ever," Chambers said.

"How's that?"

"They never would have let you go. They would have kept you just to see if you would be as hostile as you were at the beginning."

"Hostile?" said Peterson. "We didn't do a thing."

"That's just it. They wanted you to. They wanted to have you fight. They didn't understand when you refused—"

"Whoa! Slow down." This was Captain Jenks. "You may understand, Doug; but not the rest of us."

"It's easy. You had to be a student, like I said. As for your Interstellar Ordinance, Jenks, well, I told you what you could do with it. What it fails to take into account is the particular culture with which you're dealing—in this case, the Murkies."

"So?"

"So I didn't get it at first, either. Here was a peaceful world—harmless, quiet, as tranquil a planet as ever you'd see. Only one major form of life, and only one city full of them. No enemies, natural or otherwise. For all we know, not even any harmful bacteria. They lived and they died with no environmental challenge whatever. Think of it, try it if you could: you'd go nuts."

No one said anything. They waited for Chambers to continue, but he only smiled.

Peterson said: "You mean that's what happened? They were crazy?"

"I didn't say that. Insanity is relative. They were perfectly sane. But they had to be hostile. They had to be hostile to one another, to everything with which they came into contact. There was no natural challenge for them on this world, so they had to create an artificial one or perish. It was the keynote of their culture. To behave yourself properly, you had to fight all the time. If you didn't you

were a misfit, a moron, an imbecile.

"Take mankind in the beginning. A hostile environment: humanity had to band together to meet its challenge. Two men got together and they'd throw down their weapons and shake hands—to show each other that they meant no harm, that they were weaponless and could not hurt each other. It's persisted through the ages: we still shake hands."

"Uh-huh," Jenks said, scratching his head.

"The Murkies tread a different path. I didn't get it at first. I saw the peaceful world, just like you three did, but the hostile Murkies didn't fit—that is, not until I heard one of the damned things say he was bored. Then I knew. If they were bored they'd have nothing to do. They'd go crazy in a completely peaceful world.

"First mankind had its hostile Earthly environment, and we've conquered that pretty well. Now we have the stars—a whole galaxy of challenge to keep us busy, and maybe some day the other galaxies. So we shake hands when we meet.

"The Murkies fight instead. They need challenge to keep them going: every culture does. But they have no troubles. Nothing. They create it themselves: they greet each other with obscene epithets, they fight all the time, they constantly tear down and rebuild their city. That way they have something to do.

"They couldn't understand us. We seemed hostile. They wanted to fight,

but we tried to be polite. The concept was one which they could not understand: the universal sign for peace isn't so universal. When you went out that first day, Smith, you should have pasted one of them in the mouth. That they would have understood."

Jenks was thoughtful for a moment, then he said: "You mean mankind took one road because of his hostile environment, a road which by and large was peaceful because he had his challenges elsewhere, in other groups of men, his natural animal enemies, cold weather, and things like that. But the Murky had none of these things with which to contend, so he took the other road, he had to fight all the time. With his brother, with his sister, with anyone and everything..."

Chambers nodded. "Yeah, something like that." Abruptly, he stood up, grinning, and threw his pack of cigarettes at Peterson. "The Murkies were being polite when they threw stones at us: they were perfectly willing to cooperate, only they had to understand us first.

"Hey, Peterson! Damn it, I'm hungry. How's about some food?"

Peterson, who doubled as cook, went to the galley on the double. He grinned back over his shoulder.

"You're a lousy Murky, Doug. That's what you are."

Still grinning, Chambers threw a tin pot after his pack of cigarettes, and Peterson scurried on into the galley.

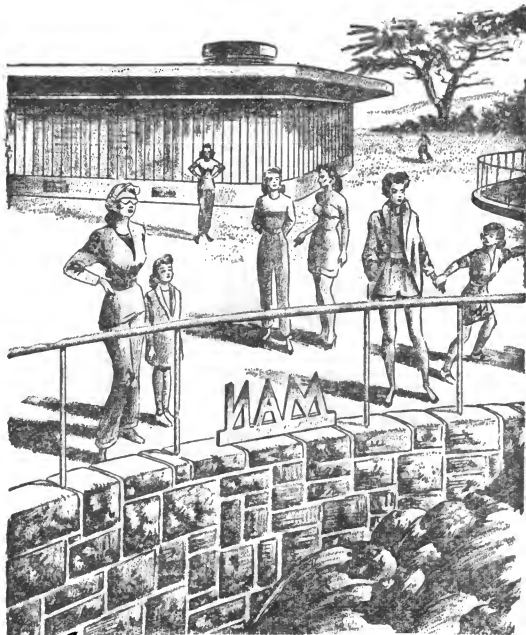
FORTY DAYS HAS SEPTEMBER

By Milton Lesser

Everybody thought it a big joke when one day a Merryville, Kansas, newspaper carried an ad politely requesting that all Earth inhabitants kindly leave the planet. That is, it was a big laugh—until children grew beards and rain fell up . . .

Don't miss this exciting lead story in the October issue of AMAZING STORIES now on sale!

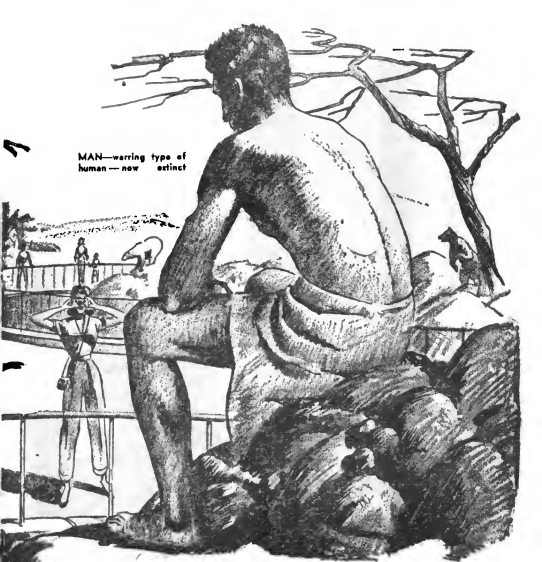
ALIAS ADAM



HE HAD MADE up his mind to escape. When the guard came to his cage with the evening meal, he would be tensed and waiting. Once she was overpowered, he

would be out of his cage and on the zoo grounds. Then it would be luck and nothing else that would save or destroy him.

He clutched the broken length of



MAN—warring type of
human — now extinct

By John McGreevey

**Being the only man in a world of women could
be fun—if the bars weren't in the wrong place . . .**

pipe he had found near the pool. The workers had left it there when they repaired the drain. It had fallen unnoticed in a dark corner and now it might buy his freedom for him. The

knuckles of his hand showed white as he gripped the cool metal. It was as if he sought to absorb some of that strength for himself by a peculiar osmosis.

Why was he planning an escape? What had driven him to make this attempt? He was well cared for—even petted—quite the favorite among the keepers. He had comfortable quarters, his own pool, and once a week he was the object of the admiring gaze of sightseers and students.

But there was this inner compulsion. It had been growing for months—an urgency that could not be denied. There was a life beyond the cage, a meaning that he must discover. Good food, a comfortable bed, attention—these were not enough to satisfy this other hunger. Its satisfaction lay beyond the cage—beyond the paralysis fence—in the strange and unknown world of the sightseers—those ones who stared at him and giggled and nudged one another.

The guard was approaching. He stood behind the door to the cage and waited. For a moment, his resolution wavered. It wasn't too late to stop. Warm food was on the tray the guard carried. Here in the cage were security, contentment; beyond was the hostile unknown. The electronic lock was humming.

Put down the pipe, something said to him. Stop. The door was opening. The guard was calling his name—the pet name they had given him—and then his arm swung fiercely, there was a thudding sound, a crash of dishes and silverware, and the guard lay in a crumpled heap on the cage floor.

He had made his decision.

A little trickle of blood edged from under the cap the guard wore. Perhaps she was dead. He stooped and listened. No. She was breathing. He had not wanted to kill her, for in her way she had been kind to him.

And now panic swept over him. The door was open. He had only to step across the prostrate form of the guard to taste freedom for the first

time in his life. But after that step, what could he expect?

He looked down at the food the guard had dropped. It might be the last he would have for a long time. He stooped and picked up the bread and the meat and put them in the pockets of the loosely fitted sarawa he wore.

For a moment, he thought she had stirred and he half stumbled in his frantic effort to get past her and through the door. As he paused for a final look, he saw it—the paralaray. All the zoo guards carried them. He had once seen them stop a heat-crazed lion with these guns. Gingerly, he bent over her and extracted the gun. Now, he was armed.

His heart sat in his throat as he slipped out of the cage and closed the door. That might give him a little extra time, until they missed her and started searching the cages.

THE CORRIDOR was deserted, though in the distance he could hear the cries of the other beasts, his companions in the zoo. All were being fed, and that meant he might encounter another tray-laden keeper at any moment. If he could get out of the building and into the grounds, he might have a chance. Even then, of course, there was the paralysis fence which completely encircled the zoo.

His footsteps echoed in the vaulted corridor. It seemed that they were deafening in their intensity. Surely any moment would bring the sound of the alarm chime and he would be blasted by the paralarays of the keepers.

And yet there was a strange exhilaration in all this, a feeling alien to him. True, his stomach was tied in knots, sweat beaded his forehead and upper lip, his leg muscles ached with the strain, but still he was happy—

a fierce happiness he had never known in the cage.

Ahead was the exit. No keeper stepped between him and the door. Silence held the great building. This had been his home for longer than he could remember. It was all the world he knew, and as the electronic lock hummed at his approach, he realized that things could never again be the same.

A soft night breeze touched his face. The purple twilight of a summer's evening held the sky and earth. He paused on the steps and filled his lungs with the fresh, clean air. This was what it meant to be outside—to see *all* the great sweep of the sky—to feel a breeze that wasn't synthetic—to breathe air free of chemicals.

Gravel crunched under his heel as he raced for the shelter of a hedge which bisected the grounds at right angles to the main buildings. Panting in this shelter, he watched as a keeper approached, looked in either direction and entered the building. He closed his eyes. Freedom, he was learning, has its price.

There could be no rest until he was clear of the grounds. And how was he to get clear of the grounds? There were two gates. Both were closely guarded. To scale the paralysis fence was out of the question. But he couldn't despair when he had come so far. He wouldn't be cheated so easily.

The still night was shattered by the clatter of the escape alarm. He was missed. Already there was the sound of running boots and the excited voices of the keepers. Lights flashed on in the building he had left and searchlights began fingering the shadows.

He couldn't keep in the shelter of the hedge any longer. The lights and voices moved closer and closer. He must run. But where? Blindly, he got

to his feet and blundered along the hedge. Anything was better than waiting in the dark to be blasted by the paralarays. Once, as he ran, he heard a shout not far from him, and there was a blue flash of light on the hedge, but he staggered on, unscathed.

The bedlam behind him grew. They knew now in which section of the zoo he was hiding. It was merely a matter of time as the vise closed tighter and tighter. His mouth was dry and his breath came in choked gasps. Never had he been so tired.

Closer and closer the clamor came. He could not escape them. They'd be on him in another minute. A sob shook his body. It wasn't fair. To know freedom for such a little while! A blue flash of light exploded over his head and then, suddenly before him was an open window and he hurtled through it.

THE ROOM was dark and deserted.

He leaned for a moment against the wall as the lights of the pursuing party chased across the window and were gone. He had been granted a stay of execution at least. It had not occurred to the keepers that he might seek haven in one of the buildings.

And what building was it, he wondered. As his eyes accustomed themselves to the dark, he cautiously investigated. There was a table with a chair behind it; and there were several cabinets. Could this be an office? But whose? And how long could he hope to hide there? There was one door directly opposite the window and another to his left. If someone came in, he still had an avenue of escape.

The chase seemed to have moved farther away, for he could scarcely hear the voices. He felt drained of *all* energy. To sit all your life in a cage

and then, suddenly, to be called upon to run, to jump—it was too much. He slumped against the wall.

Footsteps brought him to attention. Someone was approaching the door in front of him. Quickly, he moved to the door to his left. Where it led, he had no way of knowing, but he was certain that he could not face the person who now fumbled at the other door.

Impenetrable darkness closed around him as he stepped through his door and pulled it shut behind him. It led nowhere. He had walked into a closet.

In the room he had left, lights flickered on and a stocky woman, with a square uncompromising jaw, thin, straight lips, aquiline nose and close-set eyes closed the other door and moved to her desk. He allowed himself a thin slit in the door and watched her. She was, he knew, the head-keeper. Hogar, she was called, and the others feared and hated her.

She flicked a switch on the desk and in the wall to her right, an audio visor glimmered. The plain, flat face of a sub-keeper appeared waveringly.

"Well," rasped Hogar, "have you caught it?"

"No, Super. We haven't. But it must still be on the grounds. It's just a matter of time till we corner it."

Hogar made a snorting noise. "I'm not interested in your excuses. This is what comes of spoiling it. I hope the other keepers understand it's to be taken alive."

The image nodded. "We're carrying our paralarays."

Hogar sat stiffly at her desk. "For my part, I think it should be destroyed. They've never given us anything but trouble. Only animal in the place that's discontented. But we'd hear from the Bureaucrats in Anthony if anything happened to it. Let me know as soon as you capture it."

The keeper bobbed her head again. "He was always so gentle," she said wistfully.

VICIOUSLY, Hogar cut the switch and the picture evaporated. She reached for another dial and adjusted it. "Send my atomocar to the side entrance. I'm going out."

The answer to this order was inaudible but apparently satisfactory, for Hogar nodded grimly and relaxed at her desk.

He stood staring at her from the closet. She had said he was not to be injured; that they wanted to take him alive. That meant he could step out now and surrender himself and there would be no punishment.

Or could he? She hated him. Her hatred had been a tangible force when she had said he should be destroyed. She was going out. She had ordered an atomocar. That meant she would be passing the gates, going through the paralysis fence. If he could force her to take him with her! The audacity of his plan staggered him a little.

He must act fast. Already she was preparing to leave. He pushed open the closet door and stood covering her with the paralaray as he had seen the keepers hold theirs on the lion. He hoped she did not notice that his hand trembled. "You're taking me with you," he said.

Her face twitched with surprise, and mechanically her right hand groped toward the top drawer of her desk.

"Don't reach for your paralaray," he ordered. "You'd never get to it."

She stared at him for a moment and then relaxed. "How long have you been in that closet?" she asked.

"You are going to take me through the gates of the zoo in your atomocar," he said, and was surprised by the quietness of his voice.

Hogar tried a smile though it was foreign to her face. "You've had your little run through the grounds," she said. "Now let me take you back to your cage."

He shook his head and motioned with the paralaray. "The atomocar will be waiting. If we are challenged, tell them you captured me and are taking me out for observation."

Her lips drew back in a snarl. "You fool," she rasped. "You can't get away. Suppose you do get beyond the paralysis fence? What chance do you think you'll have out there? They'll all be looking for you, and you're the only one of your kind."

The only one of his kind. This was a blow. Part of the desire to escape had been the hope that somewhere—somewhere outside—there were others like himself.

"There have been escapes made in the past," she went on, taunting him, "but they were always captured eventually. It's hopeless. Save everyone trouble and go back to the cage with me now."

He shook his head. "You go first. I'll follow. And I've heard the paralaray is painful."

SHE LICKED her thin lips. "All right, but you won't get away. Those fools in Anthony. Why they don't destroy you all and forget you ever existed!" She moved around the desk to the door. "If they had to shoulder the responsibility that I have!" She opened the door and looked back at him, hate burning in her beady eyes. "Maybe if you get out and cause them some trouble, they'll listen to me."

He followed her, the paralaray leveled on her head. They met no one and the little two-seater atomocar waited at the door.

Tensed beside her, he struggled to keep the paralaray steady as she

touched a switch and the car moved smoothly away. She was watching him out of the corner of her eye—waiting for any opportunity he might give her. He hated her for her crafty smile, for the air of smug assurance she wore. She was so certain he would not succeed!

The gates loomed ahead. "Give me the paralaray," she said, and her voice was little more than a whisper. "Once we go through those gates, it will be too late. Let's turn back now."

His knuckles whitened on the handle of the weapon. "No. Tell them I've been ordered out for observation. Tell them!"

"I'm taking it out for observation," she called to the guard on the gate, and the great plastic shield that had hidden the opening seemed to dissolve before their eyes. They swept through it.

He was outside.

EMOTIONS which were alien and exciting engulfed him. For the first time in his life he was not a thing on display. He had moved beyond the paralysis fence into the unknown world outside. He was free—or almost free.

Hogar had pressured the acceleration button almost to the maximum and the little atomocar hurtled into the darkness at a dizzying speed. Her lips were set in a line of grim determination which made him realize that he must leave Hogar before he could count himself truly free.

"Why do we have to go so fast?" he said, fighting off a giddiness which seemed to grow from the rapid movement of the car.

"I thought you'd be eager to get as far as possible from the grounds," she answered, and the maddening smile deepened on her broad flat face. "Not that it really matters. Every citizen has been alerted to your escape.

No matter where you go, where you try to hide, you'll be ferreted out."

His head swam and he was frightened to note that even Hogar's image was blurred and unstable. "Stop! Stop the car," he ordered, struggling to keep the nervousness and uncertainty out of his voice.

She made no answer, but he fancied that the car surged forward at an even greater acceleration. Of course! She was racing to some headquarters. She meant to deliver him into their hands again. Unless he could stop her, his freedom was at an end. He steadied himself with an effort and leveled the paralaray at her. "Stop the car, or I'll have to use the paralaray."

Hogar laughed and the sound was harsh and unpleasant in the narrow confines of the car. "You are a fool. You wouldn't dare use the ray now. We're hitting 500 kilos. Paralyze me and we crash. You'll be finished." She laughed again. "I will hold the acceleration at this level until I turn you over to the proper authorities at Anthony."

For the moment, he subsided. What alternative was left him? If he used the ray, he would die in the inevitable crash of the atomocar. If he did not in some manner wrest the car from her, she would turn him over to the authorities—and that, too, would mean annihilation. They would not let him live now.

He stared at Hogar. She was relaxed, certain that she had triumphed. He studied the acceleration system, the steering mechanism. How much time, he wondered, would he have to bring the car to a stop before it crashed?

Recklessness caught him up. There was a chance. Anything was better than betrayal in Anthony. Anything was better than enduring Hogar's triumph. He'd risk it.

Something in his demeanor must

have forewarned her. Just as he squeezed the paralaray, she threw up her arm and hit the gun. The blast went wild and she grappled with him.

The little car swayed and lurched wildly as they struggled. She was a big woman and strong and she fought with all the desperate hatred she felt for his kind. Concentrated in her mind was all the loathing and contempt she had nourished over long years. And now, this miserable animal had defied her, humiliated her. Only through its destruction could she regain her self-esteem.

He was weak from a lifetime of inactivity, but he knew that annihilation would be his fate if he lost. He found a surprising new strength in his arms as he fought to retain the ray. He was only half-aware of Hogar's contorted face, the bulging eyes, the muttered curses. His mind told him that he must first subdue her and then, in some way, stop the car.

He cried out in pain as her thumb gouged into his eye and in a maddened flurry of strength, he pushed her away from him and raised the paralaray. She screamed and threw up her arms but he did not miss the second time. She slumped into the corner and was quiet.

Exhaustion possessed him. For a fraction of a second, he felt that he, too, must collapse and rest, that he could not cope with the careening car.

Then, through the visi-shield in the intense white lights of the atomocar, he saw something huge and dark looming directly ahead. The dial still registered 500 kilos. If they hit the object ahead at that speed! Feverishly he fumbled with the deceleration button. He had to release the pressure, but was there time? And was this the only operation that was required? He had no way of knowing. It seemed to him that the car was slowing

gradually, but he couldn't be sure. If he could ask Hogar, but she was unconscious. He had only himself to rely upon.

He was still fumbling with the button when they crashed.

BLACK MIXED with grey and there were streaks of red. Shadows materialized and dissolved against a backdrop of azure blue. There was a persistent whirring noise, as though a cog in his mind were slipping and scraping against some other cog.

With such thoughts, he made the long ascent to consciousness. Impulsively his fingers closed, seeking the deceleration button. They were going to crash. He had to stop the atomocar. The fingers encountered only emptiness. There was no button. They had crashed.

He opened his eyes. The cloudless morning sky unrolled above him, clear and innocent-seeming in its blueness. Morning! But they had crashed at night. He had been unconscious a long time.

He had been thrown clear of the car. He closed his eyes again. It was good to lie there quietly and contemplate freedom. It was good to think that he had put behind him forever the frustrations of a caged animal.

Abruptly he sat up, and the movement cost him a twinge of pain. Every muscle in his body seemed to carry its own individual bruises. Gingerly, he got to his feet. No bones broken.

If he meant to maintain his freedom, he couldn't hope to do it by sitting beside the wrecked atomocar congratulating himself upon his escape. At any moment, the wreck might be discovered and he would be at the mercy of the alerted citizens.

Hogar lay fifty feet away and he knew from the unnatural position of

her head that she had not escaped the crash as luckily as he had.

Curiously, he looked at the great black object into which they had crashed. It appeared to be a sort of roadside monument. Two figures were represented. The one—a sort of glorified Hogar—stood proudly erect, head thrown back, eyes on the distant horizon. In her right hand she held aloft a torch. Her left hand clutched a paralaray. She stood with one foot on the neck of the second figure in the representation. It was a creature very much like himself and apparently it had been vanquished by the woman with the torch and paralaray.

An inscription at the monument's base read: "In honor of Lilith Cranston, who in 2151 freed the Federation forever from the barbaric domination of Man. May each Citizen take renewed inspiration from the example of this founder of our new world!"

2151. And it was now 2340, he knew. Almost two hundred years since this woman—Lilith Cranston—had freed the Federation from the barbaric domination of Man.

HE SHOOK his head. This was too much for him to understand. After long years of captivity, when his only concern had been his meals and his daily exercises, he was faced suddenly with the enigma of a universe. There were too many pieces missing from the puzzle. How could he ever hope to put it all together?

Certainly there were no more answers to be found there, and each moment he stayed increased the danger of his being discovered. He scanned the horizon. Flat, untilled land stretched on all sides. The road they had been traveling curved sharply to the left, he noticed, and it was failing to negotiate that curve which had brought them to a crashing stop at the base of the monument.

Anthony—the capital of the Federation—must lie ahead on the road they had been following. Behind was the zoo and captivity. With a final look at Hogar and the atomocar, he set out.

The quiet was oppressive. As he walked, he strained to hear a song—any sound—but there was nothing. No bird warbled; no insect droned; no dog barked in the distance. There was only the flat land, the immaculate blue of the sky and the empty road. In the zoo, there had always been the sound of the other animals, the cries and snarls of life. It was as if here, outside the paralysis fence, there was no life of any kind—only sterile silence.

Walking steadily down the road, he tried to imagine what new dangers might await him in Anthony. If Hogar had spoken the truth, every one would be watching for him. And he was alone. She had said there were no others of his kind. He could look for no sympathy or help. He was a solitary enemy of the entire Federation. The enormity of the situation overwhelmed him.

And in all honesty, did he know what task he had set himself? Had he thought beyond the paralysis fence? Wasn't his sole preoccupation the securing of his freedom? But now that he had that freedom, what did he propose to do? Wasn't Hogar right? Wasn't his position untenable? He had been a fool to leave the zoo. There could be no future for him outside the paralysis fence. He was even now hurrying toward annihilation. And yet, his footsteps didn't falter. He pursued his steady course. Purposeless he might be—and yet he moved toward Anthony as though driven by an urgency outside himself.

The towers of the city pierced the arc of the purpling twilight sky with the assurance of habit. This was An-

thony—capital of the Federation. He had often heard his keepers talk with awe of this great city, and it seemed that all of them wished some day for a chance to work there. It was the nerve center of earth. From those towers which were now shadowed by the encroaching dark went forth the impulses that kept a civilization alive. And soon he would be in the city, a hunted thing surrounded by hate and fear, pursued by thousands of citizens who had been taught from earliest childhood to despise and loathe his kind. They would destroy him on sight.

He left the highway which gave him an exposed and vulnerable feeling and cut across the open plains into the outskirts of the city. Night served him well and he slipped unnoticed down the streets of a suburb, seeking every oasis of darkness that might shield him.

Apparently, he had chosen unwittingly an opportune moment for his entry, since the citizens seemed to be at their suppers. The streets were deserted and he moved unchallenged toward the center of the metropolis.

THE CITY affected him emotionally in much the same way as the barren plain. It was too clean, too neat. No scrap of paper lightened the deadly monotony of the streets. The buildings, of a uniform design, gave no hint of warmth. Everything was in its place; tidiness had become a religion, sterility made a way of life.

And this very cleanliness made his progress more difficult, for in so perfectly arranged a city there were few hiding places. Any passerby was exposed as mercilessly as an insect upon the biologist's slide.

As he penetrated nearer and nearer the center of the metropolis, the buildings became taller, the streets wider, the atmosphere of fierce uni-

formity more oppressive. Names of the streets flashed through his mind as he scurried past: Barton Boulevard; Earhart Drive; Victoria Avenue; Sands Street. Closer and closer to the center of the city he came, and still no cry in the night, no challenge.

A new and potent danger impinged upon him. He was hungry. How could he hope to find food in this unfriendly metropolis? Was that to be the end of his brave attempt? Eventual surrender to get food and water? If only there were one friend, just one. Anyone to whom he could go. But he was absolutely alone! One against all!

"Attention!" He nearly collapsed at the barked command. It was the loud-speaker system for the city, expertly concealed, yet reaching every nook and cranny. "Attention, all citizens!" The words fell and scattered like lost children amid the night-shrouded buildings. He backed against a wall and stood tensed, waiting the pronouncement.

"All citizens of Anthony are alerted. The Man that escaped from the Lilith Cranston Memorial Zoo is believed to have reached Anthony. Central Headquarters would like to remind the citizens that this creature is dangerous and should be destroyed on sight."

He looked wildly to either side, fully expecting to see a column of armed citizens approaching, hemming him in.

"This escaped beast represents a potential threat to the entire Federation!" The voice on the loud-speaker trembled, as if the woman were awed by the words she read. "Any citizen giving comfort to the creature is a traitor and will be punished by death. The beast is wily and capable of expert deception. Do not be taken in. Central Headquarters urges all citizens of Anthony to devote themselves

to the capture and destruction of this Man." The speaker cleared her throat. "If you are uncertain as to the appearance of these beasts, you may visit the Federation's Museum, west of the Natatorium, where wax images of the creatures are on display. That is all."

SILENCE again held the streets. They knew he had reached the city. Even now, patrols were searching the streets for him. Inevitably, they would find him, corner him, destroy him.

With no sense of direction, without thought, he began half-running, crouching against the walls. Hunger sat in his stomach like a fire. His lips were dry and parched.

The sound of footsteps echoing in the avenue ahead, sent him scurrying down a side street. The search had begun in earnest. The supper hour over, all citizens would be out, obeying the behest of Central Headquarters, determined to remove the threat to the Federation by destroying it.

The "Threat To The Federation" leaned exhausted against the side of a building. His breath came in sighing gasps and his legs felt rubbery and useless. "Give up," his mind told him. "This is futile. You're only torturing yourself by prolonging the agony."

Voices and footfalls reached him from the route he had just traveled. They were behind him, in front of him, on all sides. And what did it really matter whether they caught him or not? Suppose he did manage to elude them for a few hours? Then what?

The voices were closer. He looked about him. A light showed in the building against which he had crouched and it seemed to him that he detected food odors which must originate there. Suddenly, food became more important to him than anything else

in the world. In two steps he was at the door of the building, and in another second he was inside and the door was closed behind him.

Apparently, he had stumbled into the dining-room of one of the city's dormitories. The litter of the evening meal was still on the long table. A door at the far end of the room must, he surmised, lead to the kitchen. Accordingly, he ran toward it.

An older woman was bent over a table piled high with food as he entered. She turned, a look of surprise and fear on her face and a scream on her lips; but before she could make a sound, the paralaray flashed brilliant blue and she slumped to the floor.

Quickly, he moved to the table. There was meat, vegetables, bread. He ate ravenously, eyes on the door which led to the dining room, ears strained to catch any noise that might indicate the approach of the searchers.

He marveled as he ate at the buoyant effect the food was having on his morale. The nervousness and despair that had claimed him outside were rapidly dissipated. Renewed confidence in his ability to elude his would-be destroyers filled his mind. Already he had succeeded far beyond his wildest hopes. Why give up? Perhaps he would be the one to finally defy the Federation.

THERE WAS a noise in the dining-room. Several citizens had entered. At any moment, they might come into the kitchen, or call out to the prostrate woman on the floor. He had made certain there was a rear exit from the building—and now—after cramming his pockets with food, he moved quickly across the room to that door, opened it, and stepped out into the darkness.

A paralaray bolt exploded blue, inches from his head. He ducked and ran twisting through the darkness.

Again the brilliant blue light seemed to encircle him. He had walked into a citizens' patrol. They had caught up with him.

Excited voices added to the confusion behind him and the paralarays popped with frightening regularity around him. Only the dark and the zig-zag course he set saved him.

He paused at a turn in the alleyway to aim his own weapon at one of the blue flashes and was rewarded by a cry of pain and a clatter. That would let them know he was not to be easily taken.

Bedlam had broken loose. Sirens wailed, the loud-speaker squawked instructions and encouragement to the citizens. Special detecto-rays were being rushed to that section of the city. The creature must not escape. The streets were lighted with the brilliance of Zenith. No longer were there shadows in which he might seek a momentary respite. All the energies and resources of the greatest city on Earth were now concentrated upon his capture.

Blindly he ran, pausing now and again to fire back at his pursuers. His head throbbed and his side ached. Spots danced in front of his eyes and his anguished lungs felt near collapse.

The confusion increased in its intensity and more and more streets were blocked as he approached them. They were closing in. Tighter and tighter the circle grew. He could only find a spot and make a final show of resistance, blast a few more of them before the brilliant blue light of a hundred paralarays enveloped him.

He half-fell against a building and wearily looked around. This was it. From both directions they were converging upon him, hundreds of them. Each carried a paralaray and in each pair of eyes glowed the same fanatic hate, the same desire to destroy.

He braced himself and waited.

"Risk no chance of escape," ordered the loud-speaker. "Completely surround him and all citizens blast simultaneously. Those participating in the destruction of the beast will be awarded the Lilith Medal of Honor, third class."

Closer. Closer. He could see the set white faces clearly now. His hand gripped his own paralaray. So this was how it ended! This was the price for a few hours' freedom, to die in the streets of Anthony at the hands of a mob!

He sighted on the leader of the advancing horde. In a way he was glad it was ending. He was tired. Very tired. This would finish everything.

His hand trembled. An atomocar was forcing its way through the mob. There were angry cries and gesticulations from citizens as the car pushed them aside. Vaguely, he wondered what this new development signified. He loosed a blast at the oncoming car but his hand trembled so that he missed.

Suddenly, he was enveloped in blue light. Every nerve in his body tingled and exploded. The last sound he heard was his own ear-shattering scream and he knew that the game was finished.

THERE WAS a sensation of movement—movement forward—movement arrested. But there could be no sensation. He was dead. He had fallen in the multiple blast of a thousand paralarays, just as an atomocar had forced its way toward him.

"Don't try to move," a soft voice said. "Wait till we get to the Library and I have a tonic that helps when you're recovering from a paralaray blast. Just relax."

He opened his eyes. His body felt numb—apart from him—as if he could stand off at a great distance and look down at it. One thing was certain: He was not dead. He was riding

in an atomocar.

"I'm—I'm sorry I had to use my paralaray," the soft voice went on, "but there was no alternative. If I hadn't acted as I did, the mob would have killed you."

His tongue felt heavy, but he made a great effort: "Where...where are ...you...taking...me?" He wished that he could turn his head enough to see who sat in the seat at his side.

"To the Library of the Federation. I work there. There's a place I think you'll be safe, until we can make plans."

"Safe?" His voice was a weird croak.

"Don't trouble yourself now. Just rest."

He closed his eyes. It was much easier not to think, not to make any effort. Someone was going to hide him; wanted him to be safe. There was some one. He was not alone.

When the car stopped, he roused again. The paralysis seemed to be gradually leaving him. He could move his head, unbend his fingers.

"This is the back entrance of the Library," the soft voice announced. "Do you think you can walk a little now?"

He turned and looked at her. She was beautiful, and in that moment's time he knew why he had not despaired, why he had kept trying even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. This was the reason, this woman who looked at him now with such tender solicitude. All his life he had moved unknowingly to this moment's illumination.

She was soft. Her face was a gently molded oval, not square and angular like the keepers' nor the citizens who had pursued him. Her eyes were violet, and in their depths was an infinite warmth and understanding. The nose was delicate and the lips were

full and rounded, not taut and thin like Hogar's. And despite the stiff grey uniform she wore, he was aware of her body—aware that it, too, was softly contoured and desirable.

"My name is Rhea," she said, and smiled at him. "I was so afraid that I wouldn't find you in time."

"You—you were looking for me?" He wanted to accept whatever she said, and yet he couldn't understand. What was its meaning?

"Since the first news of your escape." She slipped out of the atomocar. "If you're strong enough, we'd better try to get into the building. They'll realize soon that they've been tricked and I must get rid of the car."

SHE WAS AT his side helping him, and he was concentrating on the difficult business of moving his legs. They still felt wooden, awkward, detached, and he had to exert every ounce of his will power to promote movement.

With Rhea's help, however, he found himself walking up a long concrete ramp and into the back entrance of the darkened library. Once or twice, he started to question her again, but she signaled for silence and gave his arm a reassuring pressure.

Only a few dim exit lights burned redly in the great building and no noise intruded. They left the main level and descended stair after stair into the farthest depths. Perspiration beaded his lip and forehead and he thought he couldn't negotiate another step; but, just as his strength was failing him, she paused and unlocked a great metal door. It swung open, revealing yet another flight of steps.

He looked at her and the mute appeal in his eyes was visible in the dim light.

"This is the last flight," she whispered. "You'll be safe down here." And with a firm grip, she gulded him

down the final flight of steps into darkness. At the bottom, she touched a switch and yellow light filled the vault.

Around him on all sides stretched endless stacks of books. Thousands of books were crowded into this subterranean vault far under the Library.

"No one ever comes down here," Rhea said. "It's forbidden. I'm one of the few citizens in the Federation who has a key to that door." She gestured to the stacks. "These are books written before Lilith's Liberation." She lowered her voice. "Most of them were written by men."

He looked in wonder at her and then at the books. How was it possible? If he was the sole survivor of his species when had all these books been written, and by whom? Men, she had said.

She led him to a couch in a corner back of the stairs. "Stretch out here and rest. I'll dispose of the atomocar and come back."

He didn't want her to leave him. He realized that he never again wanted to be away from her. "Must—must you go?" he managed.

She nodded. "You'll be safe here. I'll lock the door as I go. Just rest. We—we have so much to do later." Impulsively, she touched his hand, and then, turning, ran to the steps and disappeared.

AS HE HEARD her turn the key in the heavy lock, he sank back on the couch and closed his eyes. Zenith had been reached only once since he had made his bid for freedom, and yet so much had happened and so much was meaningless.

Sleep crept in and sat on his eyes. He was so tired and yet there were so many questions to be answered, so much to be done. How could he sleep? Suppose this was a trick! Suppose

Rhea had gone to get the others, the executioners! He sat up and stared wildly around.

No. She wouldn't betray him. He knew it. She meant to help him. But why? She was a citizen—a citizen with responsibilities, it seemed. Why should she risk her position—even her life—to aid an escaped beast? He sank back once more. The questions would be answered in time. Now he must sleep. He must sleep.

He dreamed that Hogar stood, torch and paralaray in hand, one foot upon his neck. Rhea came and rescued him, casting Hogar aside. He wanted to thank Rhea. He wanted her to know that she was the image that had led him to make his bid for freedom. If only he could tell her. If only there were some way to show how he felt!

"You've had a good rest," the warm voice said, "and now, I thought you might want some food."

Rhea sat smiling at him, a container of food on the floor beside her.

"Is it...is it all right?" he stammered. "We...we haven't been found?"

She shook her head and he noticed in the yellow light of the vault that her hair was blue-black. "They still don't know who was driving the atomocar that rescued you. Until they get that information, we're safe."

He nodded and began eating the food. As he ate, she talked.

"I know how confused you must be," she said, and her voice trembled with tenderness. "It's a terrible thing to thrust such a responsibility on anyone."

He nodded again, absently. Perhaps she would help him to understand what it all meant.

"In the first place," she said, and there was a strength and a pride in her way of speaking, "in the first place, I'm an enemy of the Federation of Feminist World States. I have dedi-

cated my life to their overthrow."

A GLIMMER of light in the enveloping darkness. She was against the government. That's why she was willing to help him. They were refugees together.

"I was brought to this library when I was only a child, and my life was dedicated to the care of these books." Her face twisted into a smile surprising in its bitterness. "Or, should I say, my life was dedicated to keeping these books out of the hands of the citizens. You see, they know, the leaders of the Federation—they know that there are things in these books that would fill the citizens with longing and dissatisfaction. These books are dangerous."

He frowned. "Then why keep them? Why not destroy all of them?"

She relaxed. "They kept these books for the same reason they keep five men alive on earth. Something makes them afraid to go all the way—to make the obliteration of the past complete."

He leaned forward in his eagerness. "Five men, you said. You mean there are four others like me?"

She nodded. "One in each of the great zoos. But apparently none of the others is as enterprising as you. Of course, if we succeed, we can seek their help."

"Succeed?" He pushed the remains of the supper away. "What do you mean?"

She rose and walked a little away from him. "There's so much to explain to you and there's so little time. At any minute, someone may identify me as the driver of that car, and they'll come after us." She came back very close to him. "In the first place, you've got to have a name."

"A name?"

"To identify you as a man." She smiled. "Suppose we call you Adam."

He repeated it after her with satisfaction. "Adam. I am Adam."

A shadow of remorse crossed her face, and she put her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Poor Adam! What an impossible job you've got. Far worse than your namesake's."

Hesitantly, he let his hand touch hers. It was soft and smooth and yet he derived a strength from it, too. "Tell me what you mean," he urged. "Tell me everything, Rhea."

She sat beside him and told him all she had learned from the forbidden books in the vault, and as he listened to her soft voice, he slowly began to understand himself and the meaning he had in relation to the rest of the universe.

FROM THE beginning of time, she said, there had always been a struggle for supremacy between men and women. It was all set down in the books. As Man advanced through the stages of evolution, male and female struggled for dominance. For eons matriarchs ruled the tribes; then the patriarch assumed control. Finally, over an extensive period of time, women seemed to accept the role of subject and offered no important challenge to male domination.

But in the late nineteenth century, a new resurgence of militant feminism occurred. Equal rights, without equal obligations, were demanded and obtained. Slowly, but inexorably, through legislation, through domestic maneuverings, women won the rights that had been so long thought exclusively masculine.

And this was only the beginning. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the female position was consolidated. Women eagerly accepted new duties—and men, in an excess of laziness, surrendered position after position. While the women became increasingly aggressive and domineering,

men were slipping into soft and decadent ways, relinquishing their priorities with enthusiasm.

At last, in the early part of the twenty-second century, science evolved the Natatorium, a self-perpetuating machine for the reproduction of human beings. The race could now be sustained artificially through the use of the complicated apparatus devised by the last of the great male scientists, Darrell Herndon. Mating between male and female was no longer essential. By this final scientific triumph, man wrote the order for his own extermination.

This was the moment toward which the feminists had worked. This was the moment to seize control and destroy male supremacy forever. Men had become weak and dependent. They were an easy prey.

The announced plan, at first, had been mere subjugation of all males, but as the fanatics under Lilith Cranston assumed control, the plans were revised. All men were to be killed.

Lilith Cranston had been a woman spurned. As a result, her entire life had been devoted to one goal: The obliteration of all men. She saw a world peopled exclusively with women, a world freed forever from the barbarism and treachery of men.

The Cranston Plan was carried out with cruel efficiency and in the year 2151, the last man died and The Federation of Feminist States assumed control of the Earth.

There was only the one Natatorium, the one built by Herndon in Anthony. Through it, only girl babies were produced. However, as an evidence of an underlying insecurity, an order was sent through that in each of the five great population centers of the world, a man was to be kept on exhibit in the Zoo. Five men—no more—in all the world at any given time.

RHEA PAUSED and smiled at Adam. "Do you begin to understand why I called you poor Adam?"

He nodded. "After the women took over the earth, they...they changed everything?"

"Everything. Change for the sake of change—to convince themselves that they could rule Earth with greater wisdom than the men they had destroyed. All the towns were renamed after great women. This city was once called Washington—Washington, D.C.—but it was renamed for Susan B. Anthony, a 19th-Century Feminist. Paris was renamed Curie, for Eve Curie; London was changed to Elizabethtown; Moscow became Katherinasburg. It was the same throughout the Federation."

"But you," he put a hand to his head as he tried to puzzle it through, "you're a woman, and yet you're disloyal. You want to change the Federation."

"As I said," Rhea went on, "they brought me here to the library when I was only a child, and through the years I earned a reputation for reliability, devotion to duty. I was entrusted with more and more important secrets. Finally, they took me down here and told me the story of these books. They impressed upon me the importance of keeping these lies from the Citizens."

"At first, I was proud of my trust. Then I began to read the books, and I couldn't believe what I read. My training said: 'No. These are lies.' But there was so much evidence. It must be true. The more I read, the surer I became that The Federation was wrong—that the old way of living between men and women had been too beautiful to be destroyed utterly." She paused, her face radiant with the memory of her discoveries.

"Why? Why was it so different?"

"Didn't you feel the emptiness out

there?" she asked, and tears stood in her eyes. "Didn't you sense the complete futility of those lives. There's no love in the world, Adam. For almost two hundred years, there's been no love."

"Love!" She said the word with such heavy emphasis, and yet, what did it mean? It must be important. He knew that from her manner, but what was it? Could it be powerful enough to change a world?

She moved a little from him and stared down the long rows of books. "In the books, you can read of the things we've lost. Music, painting, poetry—they're all dead. Why, Adam, men had even started to explore the stars, but the Federation has put an end to that. There's no creative spark left. Imagination's dead, Adam—or in a coma."

He shook his head. "Why did they want to change it all?"

She sighed. "There was unhappiness in the old days. Men and women made each other unhappy. Desperately so. And there was even hatred and malice in the family. But there was real happiness, too; and love—great love." She came to his side. "Now, it's a level plain, Adam. No peaks and no depressions. We come from the Natorium. We do an assigned job for sixty years; and we're taken to a crematorium. There's more to life than that. There must be."

HE GOT TO his feet and stared down at her. "What—what can we do?"

Automatically, she leaned against him, her face against his chest. "We've got to destroy the Federation. We've got to make a place for love...between men and women...in the world again."

Her nearness was at once disturbing and satisfying. "How? What can two people do against the whole

world?"

She stepped back and looked at him directly. "The Natatorium. It was conceived and built by a man. A man must destroy it."

At first, he didn't follow her. "Destroy the Natatorium? What—what good would that do?"

"They can't rebuild it," she answered intensely. "I'm sure of that. The principle behind it eludes them. They grasp details, but principles escape them. If the Natatorium were gone, the Earth would be at your mercy, Adam."

He moved away from her. "Why should it be? Why shouldn't they kill me even though the Natatorium is gone?"

She followed him closely. "They'd never dare, because that would mean the end; the end of everything; of the entire human race."

He faced her again. "You think we can do it?"

Her eagerness engulfed him like an ocean wave—stimulating, exhilarating. "I know we can. I have a good friend in the Explosive Division of Research. She feels as I do. I've smuggled some of these books to her. She has a special kit all ready, enough to blast the Natatorium from the planet."

"And then?"

Her voice was low, competent, assured: "And then, we assume control here in Anthony—you and I—together. We deliver our ultimatum to the Federation. Men and women must live side by side. Mating must be taken out of the laboratory. There must be a place again for love in this world." Her eyes searched him. "Will... will you try it, Adam?"

He stared down at her. The things she had told him buzzed in his mind like a swarm of angry bees. There was so much to remember. It was such a big thing they were attempting—to change the course of human destiny—

to restore men to their place in the scheme of things—to take them out of the zoo, away from the gawkers and gigglers—to give them positions of command. This was what Rhea proposed. And under it all was this strong current that she called "love"; this something that had been blasted from Earth two hundred years before, yet lived in the mouldering old books on the shelves around them.

Her gaze had not faltered, and now he met it happily. "I'll try it, Rhea."

And suddenly, she was in his arms, and her face was tilted up to him and his lips were pressed against hers. They stood for a long, long moment, locked in that embrace—and for the first time in almost two hundred years, love walked the sterile earth.

THE NEXT days were crowded and chaotic. In the long daylight hours while Rhea was busy with her work, he read the old books on the shelves around him. He read of Caesar and Virgil, of Marco Polo and Leonardo da Vinci, of Shakespeare and Newton, of Keats and Darwin—and as he read, he felt for the first time in his life an association, an alliance. These had been Men—and they and others like them had reduced chaos to order. Upon their theories rested everything scientific and artistic. Men—like himself.

In the evenings, Rhea brought visitors. Citizens like herself who were disgusted with the sterile monotony of the existent order. Citizens who had learned through the forbidden books of a lost bittersweet world of long ago and who yearned to re-establish it.

They stared at Adam, and at first he had been embarrassed, but gradually he came to understand them. These were not the gawking thrill-seekers who had frequented the zoo. These were intelligent women who looked at him and visualized a new and won-

derful world taking shape.

Masda was Rhea's closest friend—an intense, red-haired girl whose broad honest face was liberally flecked with freckles. She worked in the Explosives Division of Research. She had prepared the simple mechanism that was to blast the Natatorium and clear the way for the establishment of the new order.

Adam liked Masda. She was sincere, direct; and when she spoke of the thing they were planning, he felt the same sense of immediacy with which Rhea inspired him.

There were others—each with her job to do—each despising the present order for her own reasons: Bethyl... Keva... Naloz. He met them all, and through meeting them sensed the enormity of the task they had undertaken.

Outside the library, the search for him attained new heights of frenzy. Daily, the loud speakers exhorted the Citizens to fresh activity. Rewards were offered—for Adam—for the traitor who concealed him. Each day that the creature remains at large, warned the loud speaker, the threat to The Federation grows!

"If only we're not betrayed from within," Rhea said. It was an evening ten days after Adam had been brought to the Library. They sat in the dimly lighted vault discussing their plans.

"You think there's one of us who might betray the plan?" Masda scowled fiercely around the circle as she put the question.

"The reward is large," Rhea said. "Five thousand sifers...and enough somnotabs for a week."

"Somnotabs?" Adam looked puzzled. "What are they? You never mentioned them before."

KEVA, THE secret poetess who planned to write an epic concerning their attempt, laughed shortly.

Her deep-set blue eyes glittered. "Somnotabs are synthetic life, Adam. Take a somnotab and you slip into a coma where you dream of the world as you wish it were. The dream lasts from Zenith to Zenith."

"At one time," Rhea interpolated, "there were so many addicts in the Federation that use of somnotabs was outlawed. Now, no one can dispense them but the government."

Masda smiled bitterly. "Those on the inside get all they want. I've heard the Supreme Fem has been on a somnotab holiday ever since she was elected."

"When they start offering somnotab rewards, you know they're getting desperate."

Rhea nodded. "And that's just why we can't afford to waste any more time. Day after tomorrow is Lilith's Day, a full holiday. Anthony will be practically deserted. There'll be the minimum number of guards at the Natatorium. That's when we strike."

The little group tensed excitedly. "Who's going to plant the explosives?" Bethyl asked. "You, Rhea?"

There was a moment's pause, and then Adam got abruptly to his feet. He looked around the circle of faces and his gaze rested on Rhea. "I...I think it only proper," he began, "that I plant the explosives in the Natatorium." There was a little stir of surprise, and for a moment he thought there might be protest, but they subsided.

"If I'm to become the kind of thinker and leader that these men were,"—he gestured widely to the books that hemmed them in—"I've got to begin to think and act positively. Knowing that the beginnings of the new world we want are a result of my actions, will give me the confidence I need." He stopped and looked away from them. "I...I don't suppose that makes much sense."

Rhea was at his side instantly, her hand on his arm. "It makes perfect sense," she said. "Adam will plant the explosives in the Natatorium at Zenith-seven on Lilith's Day. Then, we'll present our ultimatum to The Federation—surrender or extinction."

After the others were gone, Adam sat beside Rhea and they talked of the plan, rehearsing each phase of it in detail.

"Suppose," he said at last, "suppose we fail? Suppose we're found out and stopped?"

Her hands touched his hair, his cheek. "Then," she whispered, "I only hope that we die together. That's all I ask."

THE NEXT day, Masda delivered the explosives. They were contained in an innocent-looking plastic case. She showed him the little plunger which activated the charge. "In exactly ten points after you press the plunger, Adam," she warned, "the explosion will start. You should have ample time to get out of the Natatorium and to safety."

He examined the case, checked the plunger, repeated Masda's instructions. All was in readiness. The fate of humanity reposed in the plastic case, and he controlled it.

When quiet settled over the library and Rhea had not returned, he fell prey to apprehension. Points flickered past on the dial Rhea had given him. It was Zenith-eight. She had never been so late before.

"I only hope we're not betrayed from within!" Rhea's words echoed in his mind. If some one had gone to the authorities, their first move would be to arrest Rhea; their second to come to the vault for him.

Zenith-nine! He made his decision. Quickly, he slipped into the loose fitting garment Rhea had brought him. He strapped on the paralaray and

picked up the plastic case. If the plot had been revealed, he was determined that they would not capture him easily.

Noislessly, he crept up the stairs into the night-shadowed library. No sound betrayed him. Quietly, he let himself out onto the same ramp to which Rhea had brought him that first night.

He paused to fill his lungs with the clean night air. It was the first time he had been out of the library in almost twelve days. He looked up at the heavens where the bright stars moved in their ordered courses. What, he wondered, would those stars see upon Earth when two more Zeniths had been reached.

The lights of the atomocar almost pinpointed him. He dropped into the shadows beneath the ramp just in time. The car swung to a stop above him and he heard angry and agitated voices. Over the babble, he could detect Rhea's protests. She was assuring them that they had been misinformed, that there was no one in the library.

Footsteps moved away and voices dwindled. He had been right. Another few points and they'd have trapped him in the vault and the plan would have been finished. He ached to follow Rhea, to smash her tormentors and rescue her. But that was sheer madness, he knew. She wouldn't want it. It was his responsibility to protect the case—to see to it that at Zenith-seven tomorrow, the Natatorium was destroyed.

He dodged and twisted in and out of the shadows. Surely they wouldn't harm Rhea. There was no evidence. Only another's word. He wondered which had been the betrayer. Someone in the little group had wanted the somnotabs more than a new world.

AFTER THE explosion, there would be time to save Rhea.

Then, the Federation would be at his feet. Any order he gave would be carried out. He and the four other men in the far-off cities of the Federation would rule.

There was no sound of pursuit in the quiet streets. He slackened his pace. Where could he hide until Zenith-seven the next day? True, many of the Citizens would be out of the city for the holiday observances. But could he hope to go unobserved in the light of day? Not likely.

He flattened against a building as the lights of an atomocar slashed through the dark. It whirled past him, and he caught an instant's glimpse of Rhea sitting stiffly between two uniformed guards. She was their prisoner. The memory of her proud face filled him with remorse and he succumbed for a moment to a sense of utter loss and futility. What mattered more than Rhea?

The plastic case was a dead weight in his hand. That was his answer. What he had to do tomorrow was vastly more important than Rhea, than himself, than any individual. He could not indulge himself in self-pity. Rhea would not expect it of him.

He continued his twisting, circuitous course. Night held the city softly and there were no pedestrians. An occasional atomocar purred past, sending him skittering into the shadows, but otherwise he was undisturbed, unmolested.

The problem of a hiding place assumed increasing importance. He couldn't roam the streets in broad daylight with the plastic case in hand. If he knew where Masda lived—or Keva—but could he trust them? Someone had informed. It could be either of them.

Suddenly, there were heavy footfalls behind him. He was being followed. He broke into a run, the plastic case banging against his leg.

Wildly, he prayed that the plunger wasn't accidentally pushed.

"Stop! Stop!" The pursuer was shouting after him. At that rate, the entire city would soon be aroused.

He ducked into a dark by-street, and stumbled over a metal container of some sort. A blue paralaray cracked at the spot his head would have been. He scrambled to his feet and, twisting and dodging, darted around a corner. Again the shouts of his pursuer echoed and re-echoed behind him.

Pausing, he turned, and aiming carefully, triggered the paralaray. In the bluish light, he saw for a moment the startled face of the woman who chased him, and then there was a muffled cry and the clatter of a falling body.

HE HAD WON a moment's respite, but her shouts must surely have aroused others. Not stopping to check, he raced on. A door loomed ahead. He had run into a dead-end. Voices babbled in the distance. At any moment, the loud-speaker would start its admonitions. He clutched the plastic case. He had to take a chance. Paralaray in hand, he tried the door at the street's end. It swung open. He was in luck.

With the door closed against the growing confusion outside, he leaned for a moment against it to catch his breath. They would find the paralyzed guard. They would begin a systematic search of the area. It was only a matter of time.

A dark figure loomed ahead of him. Automatically, without thinking, he leveled his paralaray and fired, and even as he did he uttered a low cry of horror, for in the blue light he saw that his victim was a man!

Silence held the room for a moment. Nothing happened. The figure

stood unmoving exactly as before, and yet he could not have missed at that distance. Cautiously, he moved closer. No movement gave the dark watcher away. It was utterly still.

When Adam touched his "victim", he wanted to laugh out loud with relief. It was a dummy, a wax figure. He had apparently stumbled into a museum, for now, as his eyes accustomed themselves to the half-dark, he saw other figures.

This was a museum dedicated to the days when Men ruled the Earth. Undoubtedly, the thesis that the exhibits proved was: This must never happen again. See, these are the monsters we destroyed.

Adam moved down the shadowy line of figures, each clothed in the style of his own era. There were soldiers and statesmen—poets and artists—scientists and businessmen. Each stood rigidly labeled, illustrating the terrible decadence to which men had brought the Earth until Lilith and her followers triumphed.

Adam smiled. Oddly enough, he fitted perfectly into the picture for he, too, represented a phase in man's rise and fall. He could stand in line, properly labeled, and feel quite at home.

The smile left his face! That was his answer! He had only to dispose of one of the dummies—put on its costume—and wait out the day in the museum. Chances were largely in his favor that the place would be closed for the holiday. He could go unnoticed and then, in good time, slip away to the Natatorium. He remembered now that in one of the loud-speaker warnings concerning him this museum had been mentioned as being close to the Natatorium. It was perfect.

HE FINALLY decided upon the costume of a twentieth-century soldier. The dummy had been approximately his size and he found that the

clothes fitted rather well. Looking into the mirror in the dim light, he had a renewed sense of his identification with these men who were gone. This was the final link in their brotherhood. With a mock bow to himself, he assumed the figure's place in line.

The only off-key note was the small plastic case which rested at his feet.

No one visited the museum. In the early morning, throngs of Citizens hurried past the windows, apparently on their way to some holiday gathering. A few paused to stare in wonder at the wax figures, but none scrutinized them closely enough to spot the intruder.

Zenith came and went, Zenith-one . . . two . . . three. Adam felt strangely lost and alone. He longed for Rhea. He needed to be reassured. Once or twice, when he dozed off, he dreamed that he was back in the zoo—that all had been forgiven—that there would never again be a threat to his security.

He awakened with a start. It was Zenith-six. Twilight was deepening in the street outside, and in the museum it lent an air of reality to his wax companions. A little wildly, he wished that he could summon them to help him. If they could all march on the Natatorium together. . . . But no! He must go alone—and soon!

Numbly, he discarded the alien clothes and resumed the costume Rhea had secured. He checked the paralaray and the plastic case. Everything was ready. With a final nod to his erstwhile room-mates, he slipped again out into the street.

Just outside the door, the truth struck him with hammer force: If Rhea had been betrayed by one of the group, then there would be guards waiting at the Natatorium. They would know of the plan. He couldn't hope to succeed. Cold sweat trickled down his spine.

Fool! Why hadn't he thought of that before? Of course they would be waiting. They knew. It was hopeless.

Without knowing why, he had begun walking. He walked very deliberately and with a determined gait, as a man with a purpose would walk. There was no more skulking in the shadows—no more dodging and twisting. He knew what he must do.

THE NATATORIUM was, according to Rhea's map, a walk of fifteen points from the museum. When he was ten points from the Natatorium, he would depress the plunger. Then, when he reached the building, he would rush through the cordon of guards. Even though they destroyed him, they could then do nothing to stop the explosion. He would die, but the Natatorium would go, too. There would be a chance for the other four—the four men in the other zoos. Rhea would help them. His death would have a meaning and a purpose. He would never know Rhea—never have the things of which they had dreamed—but because of him, others would.

There might be love in the world again, and the lovers might pause now and then to remember him.

He checked his dial. If his calculations were right, it was time to press the plunger. His finger hovered a second and then firmly pushed the button down.

He quickened his stride. He had met no one. The streets were utterly deserted, and it occurred to him that this was not accidental. The authorities had ordered them clear. They wanted his path to the Natatorium unobstructed because they thought that there he would fall into their trap. But in this case, the trapped would also destroy his trappers.

Ahead loomed the Natatorium. It hulked a pink and brown obscenity

against the twilight sky. This was the thing that had come between man and nature...man and woman...man and love. Adam's grip tightened on the plastic case. He pictured the glass tubes and beakers, the intricate mechanism which Darrell Herndon created to perpetuate life scientifically and which had destroyed Herndon and all men. Soon that mechanism would be a smoking rubble and humanity could return to love as a source of life. Or humanity could cease!

He was half-running now. Suppose he had miscalculated. Suppose the explosion occurred before he reached the building. To get so close and be cheated of that final achievement. A sob broke in his throat and he was running, the case held out in front of him.

He never knew where Masda came from, but she was suddenly at his side, the flat freckled face in an agony of suspense.

"Adam," she choked, "you can't get through. Keva betrayed us. They're waiting."

He tried to brush her aside. He had no breath for talk. "I know," he gasped. "Don't care. Activator set. Blow it up anyway."

"No. No." She threw herself in front of him and he half-fell.

"Get out of my way," he screamed in a frenzy. "There's no time."

"You mustn't," she shouted. "you're needed, you and Rhea." She had grasped the case. "I'll take it in. They wouldn't expect me."

He struggled with her, but with a final violent lunge, she threw him off-balance and seized the case. When he recovered, she was sprinting up a side-path of the Natatorium.

He started to follow her when he saw the guards advancing on him from the front steps of the building. If they saw Masda, they might stop her before she got inside.

He stopped—giving the guards a chance to gain on him a little. Then, he whirled and started away from the Natatorium. Paralalarays spat on all sides. He couldn't possibly run much longer. He would have to turn and face them, go down in the final, concerted blast.

"It's Zenith-seven," said a voice on a loud-speaker somewhere close by, and then the earth opened, the sky closed in, and he fell a great distance into a black pool of oil. As he fell, he saw Masda's anguished face, the plastic case, and the pink and brown dome of the Natatorium dissolving like gelatine. Then, all was dark and quiet.

"**A**ND WHERE the Natatorium stood," Rhea was saying very persuasively, "I think there should be a research laboratory erected in Masda's honor. It might also serve as a reminder to future generations."

Adam smiled at her. "You want me to approve the project, is that it? I thought this was going to be a man's world, Rhea."

She laughed and brushed his cheek with her lips. "Men and women are going to share this world, Adam. It was only a suggestion."

He kissed her. "A wonderful suggestion. Just think, dear, if Masda

hadn't taken the case from me, there'd be only four men on Earth instead of five."

Tears stood in Rhea's eyes. "She wanted so much what we'll have, Adam—and now it's never to be hers."

Adam looked down at her thoughtfully. "I think maybe Masda lived a whole lifetime in just those few points," he said, "and I think she must have been very happy."

There was a timid knock on the door of the executive chambers. "Come in," Adam called, and a timid receptionist popped her head around the door.

"The...the four MEN are here, Mr. President," she stammered.

"Good," Adam said, and moved eagerly toward the door.

"The ladies of the Federative Council For The Preservation of Feminine Prerogatives are still waiting to see you, too," the receptionist added nervously. "What shall I tell them?"

"Let them," said President Adam, with an irreverence unbecoming his high office, "rest on their prerogatives for a while. I'll see the men."

Rhea's laughter hung in the room as Adam moved quickly to meet his four brothers-in-arms, who with him must rebuild a world—a new world of hope and beauty and love.

THE END

HOT OFF THE PRESS

- - - By Salem Lane - - -

YOU PROBABLY never consciously stop to think, as you buy your daily newspaper, that newspapers are the most powerful factors in spreading written thought that civilization has ever known. They vie with each other by the most extreme methods to get every little item of news that may be of interest to their readers. They furnish a record of the passing events of the entire world with a swiftness that was undreamed of a few generations ago. Yet, the first newspaper report ever received by wire was sent less than 100 years ago.

Newspapers were the first agencies to seize the opportunity afforded by the telegraph and telephone and to make use of them as aids in conducting their business. It is difficult for us now living in this age of electricity to understand the sluggish methods employed by the newspapers and the patience of their readers before its use as an agency of dispatch began.

However, that was over three generations ago. Undoubtedly, three generations from now, our descendants will look upon our "slow" methods with the same lack of understanding.

DEVELOPMENT + PROGRESS

= DESTRUCTION

By
**Jonathon
Peterson**

IN EVERYTHING that is made and used by Man, there has been development, progress, and growth. The development of a useful idea has been responsible for creating great industries. These in turn have been torn down and cast into the discard by the development of some other more useful idea.

Little more than a generation ago, the manufacture of buggies gave gainful employment to thousands of persons. Now, the automobile has been substituted for the buggy, these plants have been changed and the workers directed into other activities.

The radio is replacing the piano; fuel oil and natural gas are taking the place of coal. Motor buses, private automobiles, and airplanes are beginning to supplant street cars and railroads.

These changing conditions of society have led to specialization and development in

certain kinds of work for a great number of people in all civilized and progressive countries. It has made them more dependent than independent; it has taken from them much of the individual initiative, so that they are far less able to care for themselves in their struggle for existence as these changing activities of society take place.

This is purely and simply because their natural environments have been largely removed and they are living, for the most part, unnatural lives. This is one of the penalties of the "Machine Age".

The question is one well worth considering: Will the art that man has developed in time destroy the civilization that it has built? We can only hope that the evolutionary law of adaptation will—as it always has—adjust the habits of mankind to every beneficial change that man develops.



THE BASIC nature of mankind has not changed in hundreds of thousands of years. When he reaches a state of being feared by his natural enemies, he becomes the definite aggressor. When early primitive man began to meet the attacks of larger and more dangerous animals with a piercing sting from his sharp arrow, the animals began to run from him. Instead of being the hunted, he now became the hunter. Securing food was much easier for him.

He soon learned that, with the use of a rock held in his hand, he could crack a nut or the large bones of the animals he killed more easily than he could with his teeth. This knowledge was the underlying principle of the hammer. He learned that flint rock could be chipped into the shape of an ax, but that it was easily broken; that there were other stones like granite which were much tougher; that these could be rubbed into the shape and size that he desired and that by rubbing a groove around and into the stone, he could even add a handle.

This gave him the stone ax—a weapon which served for both offensive and defensive purposes. The stone hammer and the

stone ax have in the course of centuries been replaced by more enduring materials, like steel. But the principle of these tools has not changed. In tracing the development of mechanical aids which man has invented, it is interesting to note their beginning and their progress today. At first, the size and power of the tools were limited to human muscular force. Now, by using steam, hammers are made that can strike a blow that will break a solid piece of steel thirty-six inches thick.

The flint-tipped arrow that could be propelled by a bow for three or four hundred feet, has been shoved aside by the instant expansion of explosives that will drive a steel shell for 75 miles. The sharp-edged piece of flint that was probably the first implement used by man, has developed into the knives of industry ranging from the pocket knife to every steam and electrical knife in use.

And so it goes—the new superseding the old—almost always more powerful and more practical—so that probably thousands of years hence, they will be amazed at the "primitiveness" of our products.

READER'S PAGE

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Dear Editor:

This is an impulse I could not resist. I have just finished reading the July issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and it seems only fair to me to say that "The Traveling Crag" by Theodore Sturgeon is one of the most beautiful, awe-inspiring stories that I have ever read. The peace and tranquility it brings are unusual and unfamiliar to most science fiction articles.

I have been reading stf for several years, having been introduced to it in an odd manner. I was on a fishing trip with my dad when I was twelve, and ran out of reading material one evening. To a gal who always preferred books and reading to people and fish, this was a minor catastrophe. Looking around our rented cabin I ran across an issue of AMAZING STORIES and read every word. From that day on I was fascinated by stf!

I have since introduced my husband to it, and now find that we have one more thing to discuss, debate and disagree on. But it's fun and we love it.

My husband is 23, and I am 20. We have a girl 21 mo. old and a son 7½ mo. old. We're just an average family, living an average life, but reading lots and lots of un-average literature.

Many times I have thought that I would like to write a story for an stf magazine and someday I hope to have the confidence, courage, and patience to compete with others more informed.

I have written a few small things—anything and everything, from poetry to historical biography—specializing in nothing, and even—to my complete astonishment—have had some published.

Never in my entire life do I hope to write anything so restful or peace-giving as "The Traveling Crag". Having it as the last story in the book made me feel as though my two bits were well spent, my time fruitful, and my life complete. I've never had a story satisfy me so much—if satisfy is the proper word. Thanks to Sturgeon, I can have pleasant thoughts for weeks to come.

In closing, was there meant to be a plot, moral or point to "Mission Deferred"? Perhaps it was overlooked in setting up type. Far be it from me to say that I'm dense, but would someone please explain the intention?

Beverly L. Wright
6416 S. C. 80th Street
Portland 6, Ore.

Well, all right fans, take over—and somebody tell Beverly about "Mission Deferred". We found it an excellent little yarn. You tell her why. Ed.

HE'S DISGUSTED!

Dear Editor:

Believe it or not, the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES just came out in Eugene, Oregon, after the July issue had been out for some time.

Incidentally, the July cover disgusted me. Now I normally don't care what you have on the cover, though I do prefer to walk down the street with GALAXY or ASF covers showing; however, that skull face was too damn sloppy for me. From now on, unless you have a Sturgeon or something, I'm boycotting FA. 'Bet you won't even notice the slump of one in sales!

Rosco Wright
146 E. 12th Avenue
Eugene, Oregon

What's the matter, Rosco? No skeletons in the closet? Ed.

OH NO, NOT PORNOGRAPHIC....!

Dear Editor:

Though I've been reading FA and AS for almost four years (I'm 12), this is the first time I've ever sent in a letter so I hope it gets published.

About last month's ish:

"Whom the Gods Would Slay"—Can't you just have an stf story and skip the pornography. If my mother ever saw that story, she'd never let me read FA again. Otherwise, it was really a good story. Original, too.

"You Can't See Me"—Cute. Get some more interesting shorts like that.

"The Brain That Lost Its Head"—Not very original, but well told, and with a very cute twist at the end.

"Three Against the Room"—Good. In fact, better than the first part, "Doom Ship".

"Conditioned Reflex"—Not very good; it had no plot at all.

When are you going to get a new Toffee story? I've read the last one so much

that the pages are falling apart. And, of course, the age-old gripes:

(1) When are you going to get trimmed edges? Have you ever tried turning a page on one of your magazines?

(2) Please, please do something about those awful covers. None of the stories have girls like that in them, so why must the covers? Don't you think it's just a little illogical to have the hero all decked out in space suit, gloves, boots, helmet and everything, and the girl in a helmet, etc., etc., meaning two or three jewelled ribbons. Once one of my teachers saw me with a mag with perfectly innocent stories but a not-so-innocent cover. I got failing marks for a week.

By the way, I have an idea maybe some of the other fans would like to copy. If you have piles and piles of mags, and no place to keep them, simply cut out your favorite stories and sew them together to make a book. Then you can read all your best stories without having to wade through a mess of junk.

The illos were very good last issue. Excepting the one for "You Can't See Me". Didn't fit the story.

One question before I leave you in peace, can I subscribe to FA? If so, how much does it cost?

Nancy Fisher
9005 Second Avenue
North Bergen, N. J.

You certainly can subscribe to FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Cost is \$2.50 for 12 issues. Simply send your order to Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 North Wabash Avenue, Chicago 1, Illinois. And welcome to the fold! Ed.

HAIL THE NEW FORMAT!

Dear Ed:

Well, now that school's out I have enough time to pester you with long letters—and I will. (This utterly useless statement was for the benefit of those people who go around tallying up the number of letters from teen-agers).

Looking thru the July ish of FA I can say I like the new format very much. Same goes for inside contents. Bloch's stuff which has appeared in FA often in the past months always gets top rating.

Fairman's stuff this ish gets second, but I don't think it is as good as his "Broken Doll".

Simak's third. Nice gimmick.

Sturgeon's fourth. Very nice, but I have the feeling that sump'n's been left out.

Phillips gets fourth because he is not suited for shorts. Or short-shorts.

McGivern wrote a strange story, but I have the feeling that sump'n's been left out.

Sheldon gets last place because he had

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464. SILVERLOCK by John Myers

This is a glowing tale of real excitement and meaning! Of how Clarence Shandon came to the land of Immortal Heroes, real and imagined—in search of his true destiny. In this rich story of a modern man's fruitful adventures in legendary realms, you find out how Shandon changes his every-day name and Chicago-bound life for that of a wanderer beyond time; what great ones of old legend and modern story encountered; and to what purpose. What loves he knew and what fights he fought; what trials befell him in the "Pin" and what truth he discovered when at last he won to the Hippocrene Spring. In the pages of "Silverlock" John Myers has written for you a racing story of time-travel where you experience strange warlike, intrapace, scenes of violence and romance! Here is an extra-long super-fantastic adventure (published at \$3.00) with over 300 pages of thrilling reading awaiting you. Just a dollar purchase and you receive this great book FREE!

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the misfortune to write an average story. Not bad, just average.

Say, wot's happened to the Reader's Page? Where are those wonderful full page ads for FAN-FARE by Ganley? Those blasts at American stupidity by Ganley? Those ads for SPACESHIP by Silverberg and those moon-bouncing things by Silverberg and McNaughton? Those Cruel-To-La Femmes letters by Bailey? I enjoyed those missives.

The babe on the cover was as usual—luscious. I used to hate those covers, but now I've reconciled myself to them and I find that some of them are pretty good.

I'm getting tired of Martians and flying saucers and similar junk. How about some of that dream prose of the Merrittesque style you've been promising us.

As I said before, I like your format, but why can't you have the format you had the first 8 or 9 issues of FA. Those were really something: Large pages, slick paper, two cover illos, and very good stories.

That's just a dream, though.

Something you can do, though, is to publish novels. I notice that you rank a story of 30,000 words a novel; 25,000 a short novel; 20,000 a long novelet, from 10,000 to 15,000 a novelet; and less than 10,000 a short story.

I don't think that a 30,000 word story is a novel. How about the kind of wonderful stories you published just a few years back: "Hidden City"—62,000 words; "So Shall Ye Reap"—65,000; "Star Kings"—70,000. I picked out three consecutive issues then, just to be impartial.

Another thing I miss are those very, very good inside illos. Malcolm Smith and Charles Scheeman. And those combination interior pics: Krupa plus Fuqua plus Smith. Seems as if FA's best days are over—or yet to come.

Fred Chappell
Box 182
Canton, N. C.

PAT EATON, SUPER SLEUTH...

Dear Editor:

In the July issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, in Theodore Sturgeon's story "The Traveling Crag" on page 106, was a little something that began like this: "Jets blasting, Bat Durston," and ended thusly, "proton gun blaster in a space-tanned hand."

Now you know, of course, that this was an exact word for word repetition of a little episode GALAXY printed on their back cover of their first issue. It was used to show the similarity between space operas and horse operas.

What I want to know is how come it appeared in FANTASTIC? Did Sturgeon borrow it, or was he its originator in the first place? In short, what's coming off?

Pat Eaton
c/o Otis Cafe
Otis, Oregon

Reminds us of that old story about which came first, the chicken or the egg.....Ed.

TRADE MART

Dear LES,

Just got the July ish. Wot an ish! Besides having my letter in it, it also has a few good stories. I shall proceed to review the stories:

"The Dead Don't Die"—Bloch. Wunderbar! Bloch is one of our greatest living authors. As a weird writer he is unsurpassable, and as a humorist there are no words to describe his talents.

"There's No Way Out"—McGivern. A very good tale.

"The President Will See You"—Phillips. Very, very good. Short but sweet.

"You'll Never Go Home Again"—Simak. Routine, strictly hack.

"Witness for the Defense"—Fairman. Very good. Screwy but good.

"Mission Deferred"—Sheldon. Good, good, good!

"The Traveling Crag"—Sturgeon. A very good story, which is nosed out of first place by Bloch's tale.

Now for a few extra comments: The cover was no good. The interiors were wonderful. I note you have Lawrence now.

Suggestions: Longer letter section.

Request: I have hundreds of s-f mags and books, all in very good condition. Among them are "Karl Grier"—Tracy; "Destiny"—Hughes; "By Space Ship to Saturn"—Rockwood; and Vol. 1, No. 2 of "Captain Future"; a dozen or so old ARGOSY'S with fantasy and s-f tales; Big Little Books; Pocket Books; and many other items. They are for sale or trade. I will trade for "Bride of Frankenstein".



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—Egremont; "Dracula's Guest"—Stoker; mags containing stories by E. R. Burroughs, and several books by E. R. Burroughs.

I would like to also correspond with Burroughsians.

Eldon K. Everett
P. O. Box 518
Tacoma, Wash.

DOUSE THE DOWSING RODS.

Dear LES:

Thanks for another swell issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—July.

Robert Bloch's story "The Dead Don't Die!" was certainly exciting and the end wasn't too pessimistic either. Praises be.

Perhaps the most impressive story was "Witness for the Defense" by Paul Fairman. Probably the reason I like it so much is because it expresses the way I feel. One has only to review his history of the human race—both modern and prehistorical—to find other eras in which all mankind seemed to be incorrigibly pessimistic and prepare for the end of the world, only to have the moment of decision pass with no fire works. In view of the things that have happened to this old earth of ours, prior to and since the advent of man, one wonders just where man thinks he is going to get a gadget with enough power to really destroy our planet. Natural causes have created far more havoc and over much greater areas than anything man has even begun to think of as yet.

It is my firm conviction that the Creator will not allow man to destroy the earth until man has developed and evolved to the point where he understands all the laws of the physical world and of himself—mentally, physically, and spiritually. If we honestly credit the Creator with being all the omni's that we say we believe He has, it is incredible that man has the idea that we could destroy the very smallest of His creations. What colossal egotism puny man has!

Rog's "The President Will See You!" is cute. Strange adjective, but expresses my feelings as no other word I can think of does.

Ted Sturgeon's "The Traveling Crag" I liked very much.

The other stories I didn't care for particularly. They are the purest fantasy and seem to be an expression of the pessimistic school of thought, that man hasn't the ability to overcome obstacles. "There's No Way Out" to me seems like a traveler in the mind of an insane person, whose engrams won't let him think logically in a world of such people, with the rest of the world ignorant of this condition.

I have just been reading a book by Kenneth Roberts about Henry Gross and his dowsing rod: How about getting some of your writers to take a crack writing a story dealing with the powers or forces that make dowsing rods work? It looks like

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a subject that would fit into a fantasy story very nicely. Either that or have someone write a real science-fiction story about the development of some gadget that will do the same thing only better!

Altogether a swell issue. Nice cover this issue, too. The dead are exaggerated, but Jones sure knows how to put a girl together nice! No one can beat Finlay of course, but according to the story, the dead's eyes weren't that bad!

Emory H. Mann
R. F. D. No. 1
West Townsend, Mass.

AUTHORS' ALMANAC

Dear Sir:

As someone observed recently, science-fiction writers seem to break out in a rash of similitude quite regularly, their thought trains hanging together like a string of monorail cars harnessed in series. Perhaps their brains all feed off the same cosmic wave and are triggered almost simultaneously once each month by the same stray meson bouncing from skull to skull across the nation.

This month, in various s-f magazines, I have encountered no less than five stories referring to Venus as a fog-bound or watery planet. The fact is, astronomers tell us, there is no oxygen in Venus' atmosphere, and hence no water.

The observable mists over the face of Venus are indubitably hydrocarbon clouds, since the planet surface is rich in these two elements.

All this is not mere guesswork, nor is there much room for error in the calculations of the various technicians, astronomers and spectroscopists who have been observing Venus and the other planets for more years collectively than you and all your readers, past and present, have yet lived.

As for the interesting question of the possibility of life on Mars, no astronomer would want to go on record as saying it's impossible, but few people apparently have taken the time to consider the unlikelihood of life as we know it, on a planet which is so far from the sun that the equatorial temperature on an average summer's night falls to less than 32 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit.

The average science-fiction conception of a Martian seems to embrace a spindling, weak-legged, big-domed, bald-headed little creature, physically inferior to genus homo sapiens and mentally superior. Such a beast's chances of survival on a planet more than 30° colder than Earth would, from an evolutionary standpoint, be unfavorable, to say the least.

To all observations, there is very little water on Mars, compared to the amount on Earth. Despite the intense cold, the Martian polar caps are extremely thin and are seen to evaporate rapidly under the

sun's rays as the Martian morning progresses, in Spring and Autumn.

What plant life there is on Mars seems to be confined to the immediate areas of the so-called "canals" extending to a few miles along either side of each channel across the face of the planet in Summer. In Winter, which is conceivably much colder than anything known here on Earth, the Martian vegetation disappears almost entirely. This must be a hardy vegetation indeed, thriving on little water, in extreme heat and cold, in a rarefied atmosphere which would serve ill to fend off the murderous infra-red and ultra-violet rays of the sun.

Needless to say, such plant life, hardy as it is, would hardly serve to support a large animal herd on the planet and such a highly evolved and carnivorous monkey as the human would fare ill indeed in such a climate as a vegetarian.

The much discussed "canals" beloved of s-f writers and fans alike, are very probably cracks or deep fissures in the crust of the planet caused by a collision with some other body in space, possibly, as is suggested by one observer, with Venus herself, in the pre-dawn of Earth's history, five thousand years ago. (See "Worlds in Collision" by Velikovsky, pub. in USA, 1950.)

Speculation about conditions on the planets sometimes falls into the category of adumbration, but the laws of probability combined with the consensus of opinion of observers over the Earth in different times, in many schools and observatories, seem to point to the reliability of such conclusions as have been drawn, with a minimum of doubt. The chances are, therefore, that animal or human life as we know it, cannot exist on either Mars or Venus and s-f writers would do well to shop around in other galaxies, in other Solar Systems for their stage settings.

Allan Paul Steiger
6055 Turney Road
Garfield Heights, Ohio

CONGRATULATIONS, IVAR

Dear Mr. Jorgensen:

May I take the liberty of writing and congratulating you on your story "Whom the Gods Would Slay" in the June issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES?

I have read a lot of science-fiction-fantasy and I think yours is terrific. It had everything: sex, philosophy, science, a touch of religion, and instead of being a hash was very feasible and enjoyable. I think this was due to your ability to really write, which a lot of science-fiction writers lack.

Also, I liked the Viking flavor, being half "Svenska flicka" myself and from Minnesota. I can faintly remember hearing a few of the Scandinavian legends when I was a wee one, and your story brings them all back a little. I think the Norwegians are a little more bull-headed.

Anyway, this started out to say that I hope you continue to write. And I shall continue to read your stories.

Hope this letter doesn't get lost in the shuffle, because I know if I were an author I would like to hear from the readers. Here's hoping you have many more fruitful efforts.

Connie deFontenay
General Delivery
Nellis Air Force Base
Las Vegas, Nevada

Thank you, Miss deFontenay, for your encouraging words, which certainly mean a lot to a new author. I sincerely hope you will continue to read and enjoy my work.

The new Jorgensen novel, "Rest In Agony", will appear in a forthcoming issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. Watch for it, Connie. We're sure that all of Ivar's fans will enjoy it as much as they have his first novel. Ed.

The Man Who Uncovered A World

By Merrill Linn

TO THE faith of one man in a great poet, belongs the credit of bringing the buried world of the Trojans to life. From the time Heinrich Schliemann was a young boy and his father told him the tales that made up Homer's *Iliad*, he dreamed of one day digging up Troy. Through all the poverty and struggle of his youth, through the wealth of his middle years, he held on to his vision. But it wasn't until he was 46 years old that he began to carry out the dream he had had since he was a child of seven.

Scholars all over the world puzzled over the *Iliad*. There were those who decided that Homer had merely had a rich and fanciful imagination—and those who really believed that the Greeks had once been highly civilized, then barbarians, then civilized again. But all the learned arguments against the actuality of Troy had no effect whatsoever on Schliemann. His only problem was deciding at which spot to begin to dig.

An hour's distance from the near eastern coast of Asia Minor, Schliemann found a flat, broad tableland in the midst of which rose a hill called Hissarlik. On this site, there had once stood a historic settlement

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dating from the sixth century B. C. It had been called Novum (New) Ilium. Here, kings and emperors had visited; Xerxes had sacrificed a thousand oxen here; Alexander had dedicated his arms in the temple. Schliemann got permission from the Turkish authorities to start digging, and in April, 1870, his dream began to assume reality.

Very early in the work, it became clear that Schliemann had figured the site accurately. Hissarlik had been an enviable natural fortification and the Romans, whose ruined city he came upon a few feet below the surface, had not been the only ones to realize the defense value of that hill. Below the ruins of Novum Ilium were an undetermined number of ruins.

Schliemann wrote from Hissarlik: "I have discovered the ruins of palaces and temples on walls of much older buildings, and at the depth of fifteen feet I came upon huge walls six feet thick and of most wonderful construction. Seven and a half feet lower down I found that these walls rested upon other walls eight and a half feet thick. These must be the walls of the palace of Priam or the temple of Minerva."

But the deeper he dug, the more complicated it became. He was digging up much more than just Troy. Every day the excavation became more exciting. A Macedonian tower, a temple of Athene, strange weapons, roughly hewn idols. Finding the city about which Homer had written three thousand years ago was triumph enough. But to find city after city—more than nine—was indeed beyond belief!

Which of the layers of cities was Priam's? The ruins at the top were those of Roman Ilium. Those at the bottom were of a pre-historic people so ancient they were still using stone tools and weapons. But the rest of the record was difficult to read—and Schliemann, in the eagerness of his search, read wrong. He decided that the second city from the bottom was the one he was looking for. Three years after he had begun to dig, he found thick walls with a great gate and the ruins of a house filled with remarkable things. He immediately called the house "Priam's Palace" and the gate the "Scaean Gate". The vast supplies of gold and treasures that he uncovered several months later firmly proved the identification to his own satisfaction.

It wasn't until three years after his death that his opinion was set aside in favor of the sixth city from the bottom, the fourth from the top. This city he had missed, because at the point where he was digging it had been leveled to make room for Roman Ilium and didn't show at all except for a house corner and a length of fortification wall which he took to be Macedonian.

But that he made a mistake in evidence takes nothing from the greatness of his deed. Uncovering the buried wonders of the Trojan world is still the most romantic, brave and magical of real-life stories.



ALMOST from the beginning, man has been able to meet the demands of the changing conditions of his civilization by devising mechanical agencies, aided of course by the laws of nature, that would produce the desired results. In an organized society, speedy communication is the most important factor, so as our cultural evolution advanced, Nature relayed one of her secrets, in the form of electrotelegraphy, that eliminated both time and space so far as practical human calculations are concerned, and made almost instant communication possible.

The ancients knew something of the force of frictional electricity as early as 600 B. C. They didn't understand this force and, as a matter of fact, neither do we after nearly 3,000 years of experimenting with it.

Amber is the fossil resin of a pine tree, and is found on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and elsewhere in Southern Europe. It was a semi-precious stone among the ancient peoples, just as it is now with us. When this stone was rubbed against some other objects, it became magnetized and had the power of attracting lighter bodies to it. Thales of Miletus, the father of Greek philosophy, explained this mysterious effect by ascribing to it a "soul", and he let it go at that.

But as the centuries rolled on, men of inquiring minds began to study this unknown force, and little by little began to uncover some of its habits. So by the time this force was needed as a means of communicating thought, it had been discovered that it had a speed sufficient to travel several times around the earth in a single second, and that it would follow a certain path in the form of a conductor if the human mind would first prepare and direct the way, and that many objects besides amber would attract lighter bodies when rubbed, thus generating frictional electricity.

Man now set about to direct the force of electricity into its many channels of potentialities. The procedure of making it obedient to the will of man was one of many trials and experiments, of discarding, changing, adapting, modifying, until the combined ideas of many researchers led to a method of control suited to our use.



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CARTON EVOLUTION

FOR COUNTLESS ages before the origin of the alphabet, there was another system of communication known as picture writing. This was in use among all the ancient nations, but it was more highly developed and better preserved by the Egyptians than by any other of the ancient peoples. This pictorial system of writing—known as the *hieroglyphic system*—has been divided into three groups by philologists: *Hieroglyphic* meaning pictogram writing, *Hieratic* meaning ideogram writing, and *Demotic* denoting phonogram writing. The pictogram embraces signs representing words, the ideogram representing ideas, and the phonogram representing sounds. In all, the Egyptians invented and preserved about 1,700 of these hieroglyphs.

As far as can be determined, the first step above the pictograph system of communication was the cuneiform system. This consisted of wedge-shaped, arrow-headed characters that were inscribed on clay tablets, cylinders and monuments, and probably on less enduring substances which were in use in the nations of Western Asia. There were many forms of these writings, and they were used among these ancient peoples for more than 5,000 years. The decrees of some of the ancient kings were written in inscriptions representing three languages, indicating that there were variations of form among the different nations.

This cuneiform system was finally supplanted by the alphabet. These wedge-shaped characters served a large part of mankind as a medium of recording his doings and achievements for a period covering about one-half of all recorded history.

Modern cartoons are the evolved forms of hieroglyphic expressions. When the necessity arose to express ideas of abstract matters graphically, symbols were necessary, and the picture idea of language was modified.

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